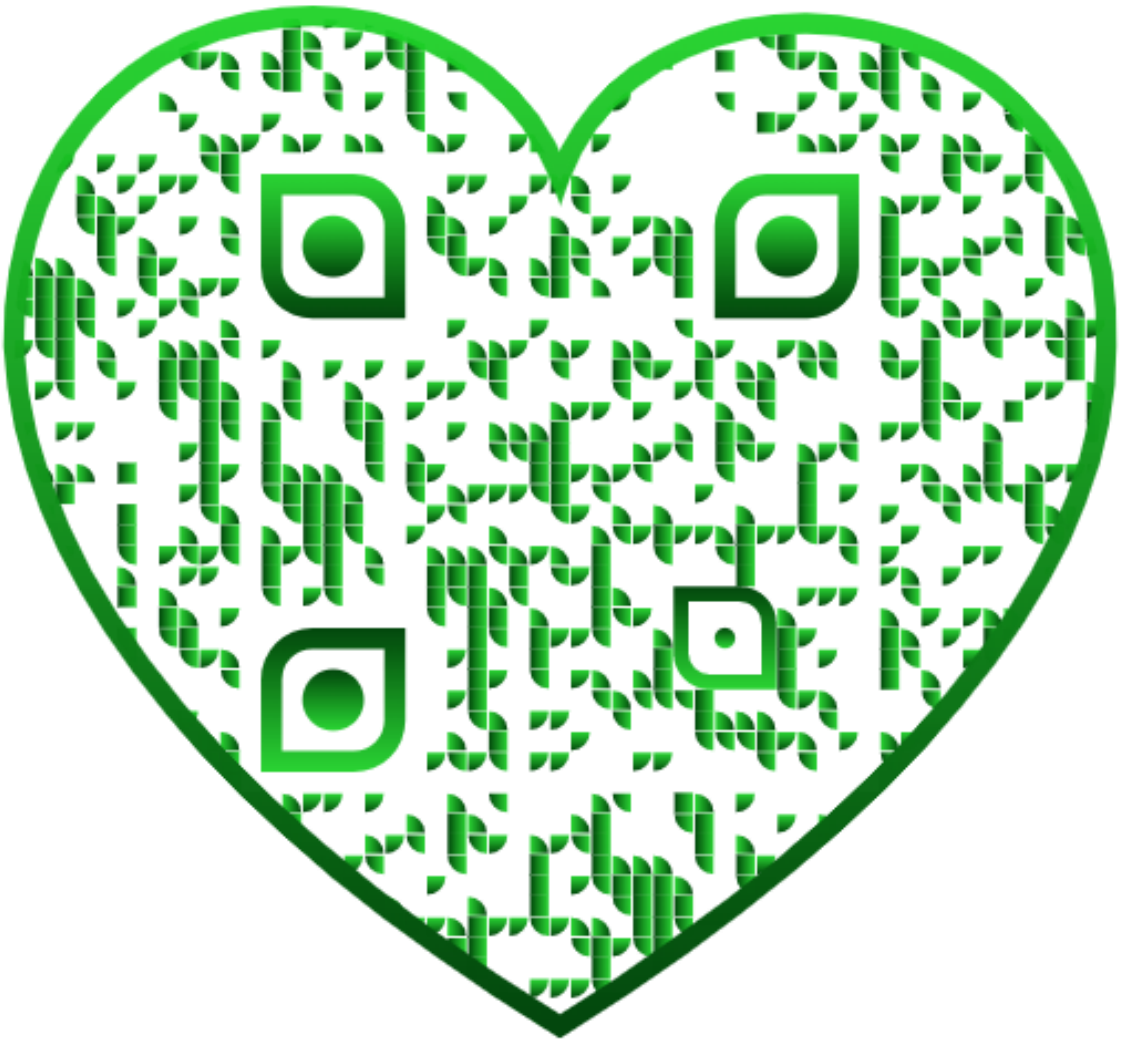
BETWEEN PULPIT AND PEW

The Supernatural World in Mormon History and Folklore

Edited by

W. Paul Reeve and Michael Scott Van Wagenen



Between Pulpit and Pew

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W. Paul Reeve and
Michael Scott Van Wagenen
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Foreword

Elaine Thatcher

It is significant that historians, whose work is to gather facts to chronicle and interpret the past, have chosen to better understand the history of Mormons in Utah by looking at their folklore, including their expressions of the supernatural. This interdisciplinary approach, combining the methods of history and folklore studies, adds a new and useful dimension to Mormon studies. Some historians might have viewed these legends as peripheral to the main story of the church and its members, but here we see that they help fill out and give form to the story.

Folklore is the informal web of beliefs and practices that we learn from our parents, our friends, our coworkers, and other associates. We all have folklore. It influences how we react to, and interact with, our environment, the people we encounter, and the ideas to which we are introduced. It affects how we greet someone new to us, and how and what we choose to celebrate or revere or fear. It is integral to everyone's behavior, whether they realize it or not, and it is an aspect of each group with which they associate.

Without awareness of this informal culture that surrounds each of us, it is difficult to understand the many events affected by it. The formal history of a place or people generally depends heavily on documents—legal documents, business documents, newspapers, and others. Personal writings, such as letters and diaries, are also important sources for historians, but even these may not give a complete and accurate picture of what people are thinking when they act. The historians in this book have plumbed other resources—student collections of folk stories, online chat groups, oral histories—in addition to the more conventional ones. The ideas in these alternative sources are more ephemeral, but they have been

captured on paper and in audio recordings. They have thus become, as one of this volume's authors puts it, "fossilized" oral traditions.

These oral traditions and privately held beliefs support the behavior of people in communities. They teach and reinforce ways of thinking about life. We need to know of their existence and their influence in order to understand fully the activities of a group. Why, for instance, would people buy stock in a mine that has never produced anything? Why would they feel justified in the failure of their town? There is always more to the story when you explore the folklore of a situation. Beliefs in the ways supernatural powers affect people's lives, such as the beliefs represented in this volume, have as real effects on communities as the weather or the economy.

Most groups have folklore, and those that share much knowledge and experience (high context cultures) tend to have more folk traditions than those that share little (low context cultures). Utah Mormons, by way of a distinctive system of religious beliefs and because of early social isolation in the East and Midwest and geographical isolation in the Great Basin, have developed into a high context cultural group with strong, pervasive folkloric expressions.

A number of years ago, I studied furniture making in Utah's Cache Valley in the short period of settlement before the coming of the railroad, asking whether there was a typical Cache Valley Mormon style of this handmade furniture. I concluded that any such style resulted from the backgrounds of the makers and the workability and availability of the materials they used.[1] The same is true with stories and beliefs. The backgrounds and beliefs of the legend tellers and the availability of legend materials—characters, places, events, beliefs, stories heard before—help determine the kind of lore that is propagated in any given setting. As the tellers, materials, and settings change, so the lore will change to reflect the evolution of culture.

Folklorist Henry Glassie wrote:

> Folklore is traditional. Its center holds. Changes are slow and steady. Folklore is variable. The tradition remains wholly within the control of its practitioners. It is theirs to remember, change,

1 Elaine Thatcher, "`Some Chairs for My Family': Furniture in Nineteenth-Century Cache Valley," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, 56 (Fall 1988): 331–51.

> or forget. Answering the needs of the collective for continuity and of the individual for active participation, folklore . . . is that which is at once traditional and variable.[2]

The supernatural stories and beliefs in this collection illustrate both the traditional center and the dynamic variability of folklore. We read here how a story of a religious leader foiled in a demonstration of walking on water was adapted not only to Joseph Smith but to several other religious leaders. According to the Thompson *Motif Index of Folk Literature,* this story would fit under motif X410, jokes on parsons.[3] The story of an event is the traditional center, while the changing characters and settings are the dynamic variables. Another legend addressed in this volume, that of Biblical Cain appearing in modern times, deals with the ways that folklore can change to fit the temper of the times, as the Cain legend merges with, and morphs into, stories of Bigfoot. Other essays show how beliefs can be shared not only through face-to-face communication but also online, as supporters of John Koyle's Dream Mine pass their beliefs from generation to generation and UFO believers share their experiences and ideas.

The fact that the stories here cover Mormonism from its earliest days in the 1830s to its very recent history demonstrates the adaptability and ubiquity of folklore in Mormon culture. I can add another dimension to the lake monster story, as an example: my research in the Bear Lake Valley shows that the monster story has now evolved into self-parody, as locals play with the story, both for themselves and for tourists. They have designed a tourist boat in the form of a green monster and have filled a float in the Raspberry Days parade with local children and labeled it "The Real Bear Lake Monsters."[4]

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2 Henry Glassie, *The Spirit of Folk Art* (New York: Abrams, 1989), quoted on the American Folklore Society website, http://www.afsnet.org/?page=WhatIsFolklore.

3 Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Medieval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*, rev. and enl. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955-1958); http://www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/thompson/index.htm.

4 Merrill-Cazier Library Special Collections and Archives, Folk Collection 29,

All the folk beliefs, stories, and activities represented in this collection are without full meaning if they are not seen in the context of the doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As the editors point out, the official pronouncements of the church are released, and then people take over, interpreting them, embellishing them, trying to understand them. This produces a cultural landscape that is anything but monolithic and monotonous.

Without these stories, the history of Mormonism would be incomplete.

The Living Traditions of the Bear River Heritage Area, Series V: Photography And Logs, Sub-Series A: Photographic Logs and Indices, Box 1, Folder 8: Thatcher, Elaine, BR-ET-C-3: 34-35, Utah State University.

1

Between Pulpit and Pew

Where History and Lore Intersect

W. Paul Reeve

Michael Scott Van Wagenen

In 1995, astronomer Carl Sagan wrote the best-selling book, *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*. According to Sagan, the modern world could yet be set free from its enduring state of ignorance through the rejection of irrational belief and the acceptance of the scientific method.[1] Indeed, he touched upon an enduring, fundamental conflict between the superstitious mind and the critical mind. Scientists such as Sagan claim that with perfect knowledge, all phenomena in the universe may be explained through natural laws. The limits of our understanding, however, have always created a vast unknown territory, which innately inquisitive humans have filled with a pantheon of gods and demons. This "supernatural" world lies beyond the defining parameters of natural law, allowing the human imagination free rein in the shadowy margins of knowledge and ignorance.

Sagan's conflict is not limited to the natural sciences. Ancient scribes often recorded their histories in the context of unseen gods whose capricious intercession brought fortune or famine upon a people. As a result, they often embraced fantastic claims with little

1 Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark* (New York: Random House, 1995).

grounding in the rational world of natural law. During the fifth century BCE, the Greek scholar Herodotus rejected such convention in favor of a more scientific analysis. While chronicling the events of the second war between the Greeks and the Persians, he explained his new methodology: "My duty is to report all that is said; but I am not obliged to believe it all alike."[2] It is this new critical approach that distinguishes Herodotus from previous record keepers and qualifies him as western civilization's first historian.

In spite of his progressive thinking, Herodotus nonetheless persisted in a belief in the supernatural power of oracles and prophets. In evaluating one event, for example, he wrote: "When I . . . perceive how clearly [the oracle] Bacis spoke, I neither venture myself to say anything against prophecies, nor do I approve of others impugning them."[3] In this light, it may be easy to dismiss Herodotus as a provincial scribe who clung to his Greek gods while superficially professing a belief in empirical evidence. Before doing so, however, we should check our e-mail "in-boxes" and count the number of forwarded messages accumulated there that appeal to our own supernatural minds.

Perhaps we ought to reconsider Herodotus by exchanging his oracle for one of our own: "When I perceive how clearly [the pope, Billy Graham, Thomas S. Monson, my pastor, my stockbroker, my favorite celebrity, or trusted atheist advisor] spoke, I neither venture myself to say anything against prophecies, nor do I approve of others impugning them." While the classical Greeks created an "empire of the mind" that honored reason and rational thought, their belief in the supernatural world remained very much alive. Indeed, the impulse to adopt beliefs not subject to scientific proof persists today. The "demon-haunted world" that natural scientists lament is territory that we as social scientists embrace—not for what it teaches us about the universe, but for the insight it gives us into the human heart and mind. It remains a part of our core being and serves important functions in our attempts to make sense of the yet mysterious world around us.

2 M. I. Finley, ed., *The Portable Greek Historians* (New York: Penguin Books, 1959), 120.

3 Ibid., 186.

Lest we judge Herodotus too harshly, we should likewise remember that the stories that we tell, tell on us. This is true of all ethnic and cultural groups. Lore for religious groups, however, tends to intersect with, and illuminate facets of, their worldviews that often escape mention in more traditional sources. According to folklorist William A. Wilson, the stories that members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) tell "provide valuable insights into [their] hopes, fears, dreams, and anxieties."[4] Folk stories are, in other words, an integral part of who Mormons are and the culture that they have collectively created. In fact, Wilson contends, "because religious folklore arises from people's most deeply felt needs, the study of that lore will take us about as close to other human hearts as we are likely to come."[5]

This collection of essays, therefore, takes us close to the hearts of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Mormons but does so with a twist. The authors here are all historians, not folklorists, who have each located their lore in time and space and traced its evolution in meaning and telling over time. These scholars take Latter-day Saint lore seriously and recognize it as an important component of Mormon history. These essays respond in a meaningful way to Wilson's persistent call for historians to treat folklore as culturally significant historical evidence. They seek to join Wilson and other folklorists who posit that "folk narratives . . . both mirror the storytellers' culture and function in that culture in important ways." As Wilson sees it, "folklore throws light on aspects of our history which have been little illuminated by the written record; it provides valuable insight into the attitudes and values of a people in the past."[6]

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4 *Mormon* is a common name applied to members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for their belief in the Book of Mormon, a volume of scripture Mormons revere along with the Bible. The terms *Mormon, LDS, Latter-day Saints,* and *Saints* are used interchangeably in this volume to refer to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and/or its members. William A. Wilson, "The Study of Mormon Folklore: An Uncertain Mirror for Truth," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 22 (Winter 1989): 97.

5 Jan Harold Brunvand, ed., *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), s.v. William A. Wilson, "Mormon Folklore."

6 William A. Wilson, *What's True in Mormon History? The Contribution of Folklore to Mormon Studies*, Leonard J. Arrington Mormon History Lecture Series,

This collection uncovers some of those attitudes and values by placing them within their broader historical contexts. It also highlights some of the ways in which Mormons and those who came in contact with them attempted to bridge the gap between knowledge and ignorance. In creating his new religion, Joseph Smith let loose an immense supernatural world filled with angels, devils, tongues, interpretation of tongues, healings, buried gold, heavenly manifestations, miracles, visions, and dreams. Smith sparked the expansive notion, as claimed in an early Mormon hymn, that "there is no end to matter; there is no end to space" and that "worlds and lives abound."[7] The historian

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no. 13 (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2008), 9–10; William A. Wilson, "Folklore and History: Fact amid the Legends," *Utah Historical Quarterly 41* (Winter 1973): 40–58. Wilson spent his career developing and implementing this approach. See for example: with John B. Harris, "And They Spake with a New Tongue (On Missionary Slang)," in *Conference on the Language of the Mormons*, ed. Harold S. Madsen and John L. Sorenson (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Language Research Center, 1974), 46–48; "'The Vanishing Hitchhiker' among the Mormons," *Indiana Folklore* 8 (1975): 79–97; "The Paradox of Mormon Folklore," in *Essays on the American West*, 1974–1975, ed. Thomas G. Alexander, Charles Redd Monographs in Western History, no. 6, (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1976), reprinted in *BYU Studies* 17 (1976): 40–58 and in *Idaho Folklife: Homesteads to Headstones*, ed. Louie W. Attebery (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985); "The Study of Mormon Folklore" *Utah Historical Quarterly* 44 (Fall 1976): 317–328; with Richard C. Poulsen, "The Curse of Cain and Other Stories: Blacks in Mormon Folklore," *Sunstone* 5 (November/December 1980): 9–13; "Freeways, Parking Lots and Ice Cream Stands: The Three Nephites in Contemporary Mormon Culture," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 21 (Autumn 1988): 13–26; "In Praise of Ourselves: Stories to Tell," *BYU Studies* 30 (Winter 1990): 5–24; "Powers of Heaven and Hell: Mormon Missionary Narratives as Instruments of Socialization and Social Control," in *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives,* ed. Marie Cornwall, Tim B. Heaton, and Lawrence A. Young (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); "Mormon Narratives: The Lore of Faith," *Western Folklore* 54 (October 1995): 303–26; "The Lore of Polygamy: Twentieth-Century Perceptions of Nineteenth-Century Plural Marriage," *Weber Studies* 13 (Winter 1996): 152–61; with Jessie Embry, "Folk Ideas of Mormon Pioneers," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31 (January 1998): 81–99; "The Role of Religion in Cultural Policy in Utah," in Cu*ltural Policy in the West: Symposium Proceedings* (Aspen, CO: The Aspen Institute, Western State Arts Federation, 2000).

7 William W. Phelps, "If You Could Hie to Kolob," in *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), Hymn 284.

Richard Lyman Bushman chronicles Smith's unfolding cosmology and then concludes that "no other nineteenth-century religious imagination filled time and space with stories" like Joseph Smith. They included an ever-expanding universe, eternal life-forms called intelligences, and an "ascending order of planetary rule" presided over by Kolob, "the great star nearest to God's throne."[8]

Within such an open and spiritually rich cosmology, it is not difficult to imagine the folk of Mormonism finding ample room to mold discourses from the pulpit to fit life experiences in the pew. It was within that process that many of the Mormon folk beliefs and legends explored in this volume were born. As religious historian Grant Underwood suggested, in tracing Mormon "doctrine and beliefs . . . to their ultimate refuge in the mind of the common individual, there may be found, even within the institutional boundaries of the LDS church, a kaleidoscopic pattern of Mormonism*s*."[9] The stories told here reveal some of those shifting patterns.

These essays focus on the supernatural folk beliefs that Mormon cosmology inspired, beliefs that centered upon occurrences beyond the realm of empirical knowledge about the natural world. Latter-day Saints sometimes attributed such occurrences to gods, devils, angels, spirits, demons, extraterrestrial life, undiscovered fauna, and other phenomena currently outside the understanding of science. These essays not only recount some of those beliefs but also seek to understand how they defined Latter-day Saints within a broader American context. Borrowing from the richly developed methodology of folklorists such as William A. Wilson, these essays move beyond the task of proving or disproving the factuality of the stories they explore. Rather, they center upon understanding what values, beliefs, anxieties, and means of self-definition Mormon folklore reveals. As Wilson suggests, there is a lot to be learned when scholars engage the stories that people tell, "paying heed not just to *what* they say, but to *why*

8 Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith, Rough Stone Rolling: A Cultural Biography of Mormonism's Founder* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 454–58.

9 Grant Underwood, "Re-Visioning Mormon History," *Pacific Historical Review* 55 (August 1986), 420, emphasis in original; see also 423–24, for a call to examine Mormonism from the perspective of the pew as well as from the pulpit.

they say it."[10] In short, the historians here treat folklore as historical evidence and explore how it functioned among the communities that created and transmitted it.

A twenty-first-century example will serve to illustrate these points. In 2001, Paul Reeve's wife, Beth, received a forwarded e-mail that was rapidly circulating in Mormon circles. The message was purportedly a speech given by Boyd K. Packer, a member of the LDS Church's governing Quorum of Twelve Apostles. According to the e-mail, Packer told a group of Latter-day Saint youth:

> You were in the War in Heaven and one day when you are in the spirit world you will be enthralled with those who you are associated with. You will ask someone in which time period he lived and you might hear, I was with Moses when he parted the Red Sea, or I helped build the pyramids, or I fought with Captain Moroni. And as you are standing there in amazement, someone will turn to you and ask, 'Which prophet's time did you live in?' And when you say Gordon B. Hinckley, a hush will fall over every hall, every corridor in heaven and all in attendance will bow at your presence. You were held back six thousand years because you were the most talented, most obedient, most courageous, and most righteous. Are you still? Remember who you are.

Other versions of the e-mail claimed that contemporary Mormon youth not only participated in the war in heaven but served as "generals" in that war. Sometimes the quote in circulation was variously attributed to different members of the LDS hierarchy, usually a sitting apostle.

Trying to confirm the veracity of the quote, Beth asked the sender of the e-mail to provide a citation. The individual who forwarded it to her then went to the person who forwarded it to him asking for more information. It was not long before he returned to Beth somewhat chagrined and said that he could not track down the source of the e-mail nor could he find a citation for the quote. In the meantime, a lay speaker in Beth's congregation used the quote in a Sunday sermon before a gathering of Latter-day Saints.

Not long afterward, the *Church News,* an official LDS publication, printed the following message from Boyd K. Packer:

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10 William A. Wilson, *What's True in Mormon History?* 6, emphasis in original.

> We continue to receive reports of the distribution of a quote attributed to me which begins, 'The youth of the Church today were generals in the war in heaven,' and ends with the statement that when they return to heaven 'all in attendance will bow in your presence.' I did not make that statement. I do not believe that statement. The statement, on occasion, has been attributed to others of the First Presidency and the Twelve. None of the Brethren made that statement.[11]

If Packer did not make the statement, and "none of the Brethren" did either, why did it enjoy such popularity? One reason is that the "War in Heaven" story was grounded in the church's theology. Mormons believe in a premortal spiritual battle between the forces of good and evil as outlined in the Bible (Revelation 12:7–9). In 2009, Boyd K. Packer gave a talk where he affirmed this teaching: "We know that there was a War in Heaven and Lucifer and those who followed him were cast out without bodies." Packer then quoted Mormon scripture to further characterize the war as a struggle that continues on earth, with Satan and his minions tempting and battling those who chose in the pre-Earth life to follow Jesus Christ: "Satan, that old serpent, even the devil . . . rebelled against God, and sought to take the kingdom of our God and his Christ—Wherefore, he maketh war with the saints of God, and encompasseth them round about (D&C 76:28–29)."[12] Other LDS leaders also preach of a war in heaven and its continuation on earth.[13]

Similarly, church leaders continue to speak to the youth of Mormonism about their chosen place in the human continuum, saved to come to earth at a most crucial time. In 1985, Apostle Neal A. Maxwell gave a speech titled "Unto the Rising Generation." It was published in the April 1985 *Ensign*, the official magazine of the LDS Church:

11 "Church Leader Refutes Quote," *Church News*, April 28, 2001, 5.

12 Boyd K. Packer, "Prayer and Promptings," *Ensign*, November 2009, 43–46. "D&C" is Mormon shorthand for the *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), a book Mormons regard as modern revelation. It forms a part of the Mormon canon.

13 See, for example, Gordon B. Hinckley, "An Unending Conflict, a Victory Assured," *Ensign*, June 2007, 4–9; James J. Hamula, "Winning the War against Evil," *Ensign*, November 2008, 50–53; and Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Times in Which We Live," *Ensign*, November 2001, 72.

> We have long heard, and believed, that the Lord has reserved special spirits to come forth in the last days of the last dispensation. The Church's rising generation of young men and women are a part of that vanguard. Reserved by the Lord for this time, they must now be preserved by parents and prepared for their special moment in human history! They have been held back to come forth at this time, but now they need to be pushed forward to meet their rendezvous.[14]

Ezra Taft Benson, speaking as president of the church in 1986, similarly admonished young men that they were "born at this time for a sacred and glorious purpose. It is not by chance that you have been reserved to come to earth in this last dispensation of the fullness of times. Your birth at this particular time was foreordained in the eternities." He then instructed them that they were to be "the royal army of the Lord in the last days."[15] Clearly, there was a ready-made space in the hearts and minds of Mormons to accept and believe the e-mail because it fit so well within existing Mormon theology. The quote was not necessarily introducing new doctrine but was amplifying, sensationalizing, and shaping Mormon notions of a pre- and post-Earth life in new ways.

In addition to drawing from existing doctrines, the "War in Heaven" e-mail gained widespread popularity due to its appeal to a sense of Mormon exceptionalism. As a "chosen" people, Latter-day Saints desire evidence of their significance in the eyes of their creator. In a Mormon context, a premortal existence filled with import and leadership followed by a postmortal life of eternal respect and reward confirms their unique role in God's plan. Latter-day Saints who accepted the e-mail uncritically were therefore granted privileged knowledge that God held them in reserve to fight his final battles on earth. They and their descendents are thus endowed with a sacred responsibility and destiny to be accomplished only through lives of faith and devotion.

Even still, such analyses leave the origins of the quote in doubt. If church leaders did not produce it, what was its source? More than

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14 Neal A. Maxwell, "Unto the Rising Generation," *Ensign*, April 1985, 8.

15 Ezra Taft Benson, "To the 'Youth of the Noble Birthright,'" *Ensign*, May 1986, 43.

likely, the account originated with the book *Tips for Tackling Teenage Troubles* by popular Mormon author and educator Brad Wilcox.[16] In his book, Wilcox told a "story" wherein a gathering of Mormon youth were informed that "in the war in heaven before the earth was formed, the young people of today had been the leaders—even the captains and generals." Wilcox then recounted a meeting where Jack Marshall, a Mormon motivational speaker, described a hypothetical scenario that might take place in the postmortal "spirit world" where departed souls await resurrection from the dead. While Latter-day Saints do not claim to know specific details about relationships, activities, and conversations in the spirit world, Marshall imagined possibilities:[17] "We will actually be able to meet great people like Abraham Lincoln, Harriet Tubman, Florence Nightingale, and Booker T. Washington. He said, 'Maybe you'll go up to someone and say, "Who was prophet when you were on earth?"'" Marshall continued, "That person might say, 'Moses.' You'll say, 'No way! You were with Moses? That's incredible! You were there when he parted the Red Sea? You walked through on dry ground?'" In response, Marshall predicted that the departed spirit would puff out his chest in acknowledgment of his association with such a famous prophet. "Then Brother Marshall said, 'Someone is going to come up to you and say, "Who was prophet when you were on earth?"'" When the youth of today replied that they "grew up in the days of Spencer W. Kimball, Ezra Taft Benson, Howard W. Hunter, and Gordon B. Hinckley" (all late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century LDS leaders), Marshall promised that "a hush will fall over every corridor in heaven when those spirits realize they are in your presence."[18]

16 Brad Wilcox, *Tips for Tackling Teenage Troubles* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 25–27. The Deseret Book website made this connection in 2006.

17 In 1918, Mormon president Joseph F. Smith, nephew of founder Joseph Smith Jr., reported a "vision of the redemption of the dead" taking place in the spirit world. This "vision" was canonized and included in the Doctrine and Covenants. See *Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), section 138. Smith's vision, however, did not contain the type of specific conversational detail contained in Marshall's imagined spirit world dialogues.

18 Wilcox, *Teenage Troubles*, 25–27.

Not surprisingly, the e-mail quotes attributed to Packer and other LDS leaders enjoyed a second life in e-mail circulation following the 2008 death of Mormon president Gordon B. Hinckley. E-mail recipients were reminded that at some future time in the spirit world someone would ask them, "'Which of the prophet's time did you live in?' and when you say, 'Gordon B. Hinckley' a hush will fall . . . and all in attendance will bow at your presence." Hinckley's passing no doubt prompted the resurrection of the e-mails as a reminder to the generation of Mormons who grew up during his tenure as prophet of their elect status in the human continuum. Also not surprising was that the second round of e-mails prompted another denunciation of the quote from LDS headquarters, with instructions to local leaders to ensure that the quote not be perpetuated in talks, newsletters, classes, or bulletins.[19]

If the Wilcox book was indeed the source of the errant quote, it is evident that various recipients served as legend transmitters who reshaped the story as it passed from computer to computer and from pulpit to pew. Folklorists Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi call the passage of lore through time and space the "legend process"—"the procedure by which legends are being generated, formulated, transmuted, and crystallized by means of communication through the legend conduit." That conduit, Dégh and Vázsonyi suggest, is the process of legend transmission through a "sequence of individuals who qualify as legend receivers and transmitters."[20]

In the "War in Heaven" example, the receivers and transmitters were the dutiful Mormons who forwarded the e-mail to their deserving list of receivers, who subsequently became transmitters themselves. The e-mail versions contained an essential element designed to

19 For evidence of the quote's circulation following Hinckley's death as played out on Mormon blogs, see Mormon Mentality, "False Statement (Gettin' the word out on 'Youth were generals' letter," http://www.mormonmentality.org/2008/03/11/guest-post-by-dan-dubei-gettin-the-word-out-on-youth-were-generals-letter.htm; and Julie M. Smith, "The Quote that Wouldn't Die," *Times and Seasons*, http://timesandseasons.org/index.php/2008/03/the-quote-that-wouldnt-die/. The LDS Church's response was posted on its website in 2008 but has since been removed.

20 Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi, "Legend and Belief," in *Folklore Genres,* ed. Dan Ben-Amos (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), 119–23.

build credibility and to facilitate acceptance and transmission, with a Mormon apostle as the source. Apostles are trusted authority figures in Mormon culture, men whom the faithful sustain as "prophets, seers, and revelators." Their names associated with the quote, rather than that of Brad Wilcox or Jack Marshall, was no doubt designed to legitimize, authenticate, and create an air of truth in the minds of believers. Because apostles were prophets, seers, and revelators, the Mormon faithful would likely accept the apostles' ability to know such detail about the pre-Earth war in heaven and the post-Earth spirit world. An apostolic source provided credibility-building detail, a crucial element for acceptance and transmission in Mormon circles.

Lay speakers further conveyed the tale using the authority of the pulpit, where it was received by congregations who continued to transmit it orally and electronically. In its retelling, the story spiraled off in a variety of directions and took on a life and momentum of its own. Lost in the many trajectories of the story was the identity of the individual who first truncated the Brad Wilcox account and ascribed its origin to an important Mormon authority. This is not unexpected since once the legend process begins, each receiver and transmitter becomes an author, shaping and molding the quote to fit the circumstances of the retelling.

Beyond its message and meaning to Latter-day Saints, this story demonstrates the central themes of this book—that the expansive worldview of Mormonism has created a vast negotiable space between pulpit and pew for Latter-day Saints to order their universe and define their place within it. Despite efforts from the church hierarchy to suppress and denounce this and other folktales, such stories have nonetheless enjoyed popularity among Mormons. The fact that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is built upon a foundation of unpaid and largely untrained local clergy makes Mormon congregations particularly ripe for a dynamic interplay between official church doctrine and folk belief. Both are liberally dispensed from the pulpit, where they find new interpretations and life among those in the pew. The essays in this collection demonstrate this dynamic at work.

To begin with, this volume explores the good-versus-evil paradigm represented by the "War in Heaven" story. Mormon lore frequently

served to bolster faith and shore up commitment. Ironically, this was often accomplished through sensationalizing the opposition to the Mormon cause. The first two selections, Matthew Bowman's chapter on "A Mormon Bigfoot" and W. Paul Reeve's on Gadianton robber legends, both deal with Mormon notions of the escalating struggle with Satan and his minions unleashed by the founding of the Latter-day Saint religion. Mormonism claims to be a complete restoration of Jesus Christ's primitive church founded anew through Joseph Smith. In the worldview of Latter-day Saints, Satan could not stand idly by and allow Jesus's work to move forward unhampered. The "restoration" of the gospel consequently hastened the cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil already in progress. Supernatural opposition to the church thus testified of Satan's displeasure at the true course of Mormonism.

Bowman's essay puts a face on Mormon notions of evil. In 1835, early Mormon apostle David W. Patten reported an encounter with the biblical Cain in Tennessee. As punishment for the murder of his brother Abel, God turned Cain into a large hairy beast who wandered the byways of the American frontier. Cain stories persisted well into the twentieth century, providing reinforcement to legend tellers and receivers alike of the divinity of the Mormon cause in the face of such supernatural opposition. Over time, Cain tales evolved into more typical "Bigfoot" stories being told outside the Mormon cultural region, an intriguing transition that Bowman locates within broader historical forces.

Cain was not the only supernatural entity at work in Mormonism. Reeve's chapter chronicles Latter-day Saint encounters with demonic possessions. He specifically explores how the possession experiences intersected with, and gave rise to, doctrinal ideas about disembodied evil spirits. Those theological notions of evil, preached from the pulpit, in turn spawned a corresponding array of folk beliefs centered upon "Gadianton robbers," a nefarious band of murderers from Mormon scripture. According to Reeve, the robber legends served important anxiety-relieving functions for Mormon settlers attempting to colonize the inhospitable, semiarid expanses of the Great Basin. Robber stories suggested that in some locations, luckless Mormons founded

their towns upon ancient Gadianton burial grounds filled with evil spirits. Early Mormon pioneers could therefore blame their settlement failures on these supernatural forces. The robber legends consequently offered Mormon colonizers an otherworldly excuse for abandoning already troublesome community-building efforts.

Just as some Mormon colonizers found doctrinal context for their Gadianton robber legends, others sought to better understand the mysteries of death within their broader theological milieu. Bowman's second entry establishes a broad Christian chronology for stories of restoring life to the dead. He traces the practice to the ministry of Jesus and offers examples from both the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Bowman then situates Mormon raising-the-dead experiences against the backdrop of tension between the rational Christianity of the Enlightenment and popular notions of Christian enthusiasm. Bowman analyzes the boundaries Mormons encountered in their attempts to raise the dead and locates Mormon sovereignty for such power with God himself. As Mormons eventually understood it, death was ultimately God's dominion and neither faith nor priesthood ministrations could save a person appointed to die. For Bowman, raising-the-dead stories reminded Mormons that God had a divine plan for their lives and that they should not tempt God or ask for things against his will. Tales of children returned to life with decaying bodies, dour spirits, and shattered minds reminded Mormons to always include "thy will be done" in their heavenly petitions.

Like Bowman, Michael Scott Van Wagenen illustrates the interplay between doctrine and the supernatural world that is crucial to understanding Mormon folklore. Van Wagenen places the unknown objects that Latter-day Saints witnessed soaring through the night skies within the context of what he calls "the critical juncture between the Nauvoo period and the Mormon exodus to the Rocky Mountains." Mormons of this era interpreted these "singular phenomena" as signs of Jesus Christ's imminent Second Coming. In the aftermath of the Millerites' failed predictions of Christ's return, Latter-day Saints began exploring more rational explanations for these heavenly mysteries. In the mid-twentieth century, however, a number of well-documented encounters with "Unidentified Flying Objects" in the western states

helped shape popular Mormon beliefs about such encounters and opened up the possibilities that human life existed throughout God's expansive universe.

Van Wagenen's findings highlight an important aspect of the legend process among Mormons: the reciprocal interaction between folk belief and pronouncements from the pulpit. As it was for the Gadianton robber lore and raising-the-dead stories, the pulpit would seem the natural source for growing Mormon faith in extraterrestrial life. Van Wagenen discovered, however, that UFO beliefs originated from the folk in the pew and flowed to the authorities at the pulpit. During the 1970s, the phenomena grew to the point that official Mormon magazines addressed extraterrestrial visitations in an attempt to co-opt popular UFO accounts, legitimize them, and place them well within the framework of Mormon cosmology. Such official recognition from the pulpit likely lent credibility to the UFO encounters among believers in the pew. It also sent an entirely new series of legend conduits spinning in a variety of directions and demonstrated that the flow of information between the general membership and its leaders was capable of moving in both directions. As Van Wagenen points out, those who continue to cling to UFO stories exist largely on Mormonism's fringe. Still, the existence of these beliefs within Mormonism is traceable, much like the "War in Heaven" quote, to a broadminded worldview created by Joseph Smith.

Smith's belief system also created a millenarian theology in which Mormons play a key role during the end times. As Kevin Cantera's chapter illustrates, would-be heirs of Smith's legacy patterned their histories after that of the founding prophet in an effort to lend credibility to their assertions. In Utah Territory, John Hyrum Koyle claimed heavenly manifestations of his own to bolster faith in a risky economic venture. Like Smith, Koyle reported that an angel directed him to seek buried treasure in what came to be called the Dream Mine. Even though LDS leaders eventually excommunicated Koyle, belief in his predictions and prophecies persists. Decades after his death, Koyle's mine continues to attract a loyal cadre of investors united in their belief in the validity of his prophecies. As Cantera demonstrates, stock in the Dream Mine cuts across religious boundaries to include

practicing members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as well as separatist Fundamentalists who practice polygamy on the fringes of society. While stockholders differ as to theology, they nonetheless share a belief in the Dream Mine and its promised role to save the LDS Church from financial ruin in the end of times.

The folklore in this collection, while likely paralleling lore in other cultures or religious traditions, is frequently centered upon beliefs unique to Mormonism. Alan Morrell's chapter on the "Bear Lake Monster," however, situates the lore surrounding Mormonism's own version of the Loch Ness Monster within a broader American context. Juxtaposed against the work of P. T. Barnum and the corresponding nineteenth-century tension between the supernatural and scientific minds, the Mormon "Nessie" loses much of its distinctiveness. As Morrell suggests, immersing the Bear Lake Monster in such an expansive ocean nearly drowns it. In Barnum's extraordinary world, Utah's watery beast loses its peculiarity altogether, recasting its Mormon believers into mainstream Americans years before they underwent their broader Americanization process. Morrell discovers that even though there were stark peculiarities about the worldview of nineteenth-century Mormons, belief in a ninety-foot, lake-dwelling serpent placed them firmly in the mainstream. Polygamy and theocracy may have set the Mormons apart, but, Morrell contends, the Bear Lake Monster did not.

This collection concludes with a look at how non-Mormons created folklore to better understand their peculiar neighbors. Stanley J. Thayne's "Walking on Water" entry explores this process among New Yorkers who came in contact with nineteenth-century Mormons. Joseph Smith's fantastic claims of prophecy and supernatural power prompted a desire among "gentiles" to rationalize away the new religion and its reported miracles. Key among these were reports of Smith's failed attempts to walk on water. As Thayne reveals, those who repeated stories of Joseph Smith's alleged failures did so as proof that the Mormon prophet was a fraud. They found context and authority in the Bible, which became their version of the Mormon pulpit. They also found similarities in tales told about other religious leaders of the region, including the prophet Jemima Wilkinson, who predated

Smith by about fifty years. As Thayne sees it, the walking-on-water legends "were a natural folk reaction to modern prophets" that "served as a reassurance for those who chose to disbelieve." In the end, the relationship between the folklore of Mormons and that of their non-believing neighbors reveals the universal desire of human beings to make sense of the unexplainable and to find order in chaos.

Taken collectively, the essays in this book demonstrate that in the absence of perfect knowledge, humanity still engages in a balancing act between the scientific and supernatural mind to understand an often mysterious world. The issue here is not the veracity of the folk beliefs, but what they teach us about the faith, values, attitudes, and fears of the Latter-day Saints and their neighbors. These essays expand our understanding of how folklore allowed Mormons and others to confront the unknown natural world in ways that nonetheless confirmed their faith and supported their community. In their rich trove of folktales, they found a means to define prophecy, battle monsters and demons, understand lights in the sky, comprehend death, and foster hope in an uncertain future. Ultimately, this collection demonstrates the evolving nature of Mormonism and the ample space that exists between pulpit and pew for its believers to make meaning for their lives within the pale of an incomplete yet vast cosmology.

2

A Mormon Bigfoot

David Patten's Cain and the Conception of Evil in LDS Folklore[1]

Matthew Bowman

In the spring of 1835, while serving a mission in Tennessee and staying with the family of Abraham O. Smoot, a future stake president in and mayor of Salt Lake City and Provo, the LDS apostle David W. Patten, claimed to have seen Cain. Lycurgus Wilson's 1900 biography of Patten reprinted a letter Smoot sent to Joseph F. Smith in 1893, reporting Patten's claim that while riding his mule back to Smoot's home he

> met with a very remarkable personage who had represented himself as being Cain who had murdered his brother, Abel . . . I suddenly noticed a very strange personage walking beside me . . . for about two miles. His head was about even with my shoulders as I sat in my saddle. He wore no clothing but was covered with hair. His skin was very dark . . . he [said] that he had no home, that he was a wanderer in the earth . . . He said that he was a very miserable creature, that he had earnestly sought death . . . but that he could not die, and his mission was to destroy the souls of men . . . I rebuked him in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by virtue of the Holy Priesthood, and commanded him to go hence and he immediately departed out of my sight.[2]

1 A version of this essay was previously published in the *Journal of Mormon History* 33 (Fall 2007): 62–82.

2 Cited in Lycurgus A. Wilson, *The Life of David W. Patten, The First Apostolic*

Patten's story has since become mildly famous, an essential piece of Latter-day Saint folklore, and the inspiration for countless campfire tales and at least one full novel.[3] Cain, the first murderer, is a powerful theological symbol of sin in the Western religious tradition. For Mormons, however, he is weighed with a host of roles beyond this—he has been, and sometimes still is, seen as a conscious ally of Satan, and father of a cursed race. His changing role in the folklore of Mormonism, then, is worth examining for the insight it provides into the ways in which the Mormon mind has dealt with these issues over the course of its history.

Patten's story persisted within Mormonism past Smoot's 1893 letter to Smith and into the twentieth century. Numerous stories of encounters with Cain in the Fife Folklore Archives at Utah State University are prefaced with statements such as that offered by a Brigham Young University student in 1972, who "said that he heard this story from a religion teacher on the B.Y.U. campus. He said the teacher told it as a true story." Another story, collected from a Salt Lake City Deseret Book employee in 1980, begins, "several people have told me that Cain is still alive. They are actually teaching it in some Seminary classes here [in Salt Lake City]." A BYU anthropology student in the 1970s reported hearing the Patten story told as fact by his grandfather. Even Spencer W. Kimball, former president of the church, recounted Patten's story as fact in his book *The Miracle of Forgiveness*—a book now regarded as a Mormon classic and still widely read more than thirty years after its publication. In his retelling, Kimball noted that Cain's fate—as the cursed being himself recounted it to Patten—should serve as a warning about the plight of those whose sins are heinous enough to prove unforgivable.[4]

Of course, many Mormons in the late twentieth century would listen to Patten's story with skepticism; even the Deseret Book

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Martyr (Salt Lake City: *Deseret News*, 1900), 45–47.

3 Seth Lester, *Clan of Cain* (Bangor, ME: Booklocker, 2001).

4 Folk Collection 8a, Group 7, Box 3, 1.1.4.3.9.1, 1.1.4.3.7.1, and 1.1.4.3.5.1; Fife Folklore Archives, Special Collections, Utah State University Libraries, Logan, Utah; Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1969), 127–28.

employee above denied believing the story that her seminary teacher had taught her. But that did not stop the tale from circulating; new variations continued to appear in the Utah State and BYU archives into the 1990s. Clearly, the story has held a grip upon the Latter-day Saint imagination, and the transformations it has undergone—even in face of increased skepticism—can teach us something about the changing Mormon worldview. Today there is a common point to many of the stories, as in one tale told by a BYU student in 1990 that began, "Did you guys know that Bigfoot is really Cain?" In a 2003 article discussing Utah folklore, the *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City) noted that "the Bigfoot/Cain idea originated in 1980 following apparent Bigfoot sightings in South Weber" in February of that year.[5] Indeed, throughout the legendry, Cain is described variously as being "covered in hair," "bigger than anybody he'd ever seen before," "a big, hairy creature," and so forth.[6] In the most recent folklore, even if Cain is not explicitly identified as Bigfoot, those features that might lead to such identification are emphasized—the hairiness, the animalistic qualities—rather than the supernatural characteristics such as the curse or demonic intent that Patten stressed. The conflation of these two legends is a study in the transformation of Mormon culture, as reflected in its folklore. The simplest lesson to be drawn here is that skepticism about the veracity of such tales can be interpreted as a reflection of the declining belief in physical manifestations of supernatural evil. However, the content of Cain stories reflects more subtle changes. The reidentification of Cain as Bigfoot can show us one of them—through this process, Cain has come to be identified with the mainstream legendary figure and is stripped of his spiritual status as an intelligent, malevolent agent of supernatural evil, a presence accepted, and even expected, in nineteenth-century Mormon life. Further, this dehumanization of Cain reflects the weakening grip of the "curse of Cain" folk doctrine that associated him with the stigmatized African

5 Lynn Arave, "Living in Utah," *Deseret News*, July 24, 2003.

6 Folk Collection 8a, Group 2, Box 12, 1.8.1.21.1. Fife Folklore Archives. The first is David Patten's, from Lycurgus A.Wilson, *Life of David W. Patten*, 45. The second is from Folk Collection 8a, Group 7, Box 3, 1.1.4.3.5.1, and the last is from Folk Collection 8, Box 73, 01-041, both in Fife Folklore Archives.

race. In these ways the uncoupling of Cain and the demonic is indicative of a larger process of cultural assimilation and transformation.

The layering of a culturally or religiously specific element such as Mormonism's Cain upon a more widely known folk legend such as Bigfoot is not a unique event. In his study of Three Nephites legends, folklorist Hector Lee noted that new developments in the legend cycle were largely "apocryphal . . . added by the folk themselves." Rather than emerging from Mormon-specific doctrine or culture, they were increasingly homogeneous with American culture, reflecting the motifs and, most importantly, the lessons of nationally popular urban legends. Lee asked rhetorically, "How much non-Mormon traditional lore can [the stories] absorb and still remain Nephite [or Mormon] stories?" The answer, as the Cain/Bigfoot stories demonstrate, is quite a lot. Lee argued that the unique aspects of Mormon legendry would wither as the line between American and LDS cultures grew increasingly blurry, and that the absorption of non-Mormon motifs was a sign of this. Folklorist William Wilson, however, has demonstrated that quite the opposite has occurred. In a series of articles, Wilson pointed out that the Three Nephites legends have persisted and adapted even as the insularity of Mormon community has faded. Indeed, the story has proved strong enough to absorb in its entirety the much better-known legend of the vanishing hitchhiker—a phantom picked up on the side of the road by an unwary driver only to disappear from the backseat. When encountered by a Mormon in the tale, the phantom becomes a Nephite and utters some Mormon-specific warning. Thus, the structure reflects generic American legendry, though the content remains Mormon.[7]

I would argue that the assimilation of non-Mormon lore into Mormon legend demonstrates the vitality, not the stagnation, of Mormon folklore; it is a strength rather than the weakness Lee claimed it to be. As Wilson argues, these stories, even in their modern form, "tell us of a personal God concerned with our individual problems"; they teach of the continuing relevance of the spiritual in everyday life. The

7 Hector Lee, *The Three Nephites: The Substance and Significance of the Legend in Folklore* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1949), 56–57. William A. Wilson, "Freeways, Parking Lots, and Ice Cream Stands: The Three Nephites in Contemporary Society." *Dialogue* 21 (Autumn 1988): 13–26.

persistence of the supernatural figure of Cain through a series of transformations is consistent with this argument and, combined with such stories as the Nephite/hitchhiker legends, demonstrates that Mormon folklore is strong enough to maintain a worldview in which the basic supernatural elements of the faith play an essential role. Though the nature of Cain—his role and identity—has changed, placing such a biblical figure in an essentially secular tale such as Bigfoot's is a prime example of what Jan Brunvand calls "the Bible of the folk," story cycles that extend the sacred territory of scripture into such seemingly secular topics as anatomy (a stuck piece of the infamous apple providing a name for the voice box) and botany (certain species of tree cursed for being the material of Christ's cross).[8] This shift—the preservation of the basic supernaturalism of Patten's tale, despite a process of adaptation—has occurred as earlier meanings of Cain, more overtly demonic and racial in nature, have faded.

The easiest thing to overlook about Patten's story, yet also the most important not to forget, is that he was believed. Smoot's letter, as reprinted in Lycurgus Wilson's biography, is the only written description of the event and was produced in response to an inquiry made by Joseph F. Smith, who was then a member of the First Presidency. Smoot wrote about "the subject of the visit of Cain to Brother David W. Patten in the state of Tennessee, about which [Smith] wrote to [him]." Smoot fills his story with details, remembering that it was "just twilight" when Patten returned, and pronouncing himself quite certain of the date. Clearly, Smith had heard the story and was intrigued enough to investigate. The letter makes it clear Smoot believed it to be fact. After receiving the letter, Smith informed the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles about Smoot's description, and the apostle Abraham Cannon wrote that this discussion made him reconsider his assumptions—as he wrote, before that day "I always entertained the idea that Cain was dead." All three men, is appears, took the story seriously.[9]

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8 Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 88. The term "Bible of the folk" ultimately derives from Francis Lee Utley, "The Bible of the Folk," *California Folklore Quarterly* 4 (January 1945): 1–17.

9 Quoted in Lycurgus A. Wilson, *Life of David W. Patten*, 45. Abraham H.

There is also evidence that the story circulated among Mormons throughout the nineteenth century; in 1884, Eliza R. Snow produced a poem discussing the event, writing about Cain that

> As seen by David Patten, he was dark
> When pointing at his face of glossy jet
> Cain said, "You see the curse is on me yet."
> The first of murderers, now he fills his post
> And reigns as king o'er all the murd'rous host.[10]

This poem was presented at a formal gathering of church leaders and Snow family members celebrating the birthday of Eliza's brother Lorenzo, then a member of the First Presidency. Her casual mention of Patten's encounter makes it appear as though the occurrence was known and more, accepted by the audience she wrote for fifty years after the fact.

The Cain of Patten and Eliza Snow—condemned by God, reigning in hell, and walking the earth—reflected the religious assumptions of nineteenth-century Mormonism. Philip Barlow has argued that Mormons of this period shared in common Protestant assumptions of biblical literalism. Cain's curse was therefore taken seriously and wedded with a more unique belief in what Brigham Young termed "spiritual warfare," a supernatural struggle waged between the forces of good and evil over the well-trodden battleground of everyday life. As historian Paul Reeve has argued, the concept of a "spiritual battle between the forces of good and evil [was] manifest in nineteenth century Mormon theology." Nineteenth-century Mormon leaders embraced a Pauline conception of sin that identified evil as an external force, which, as in the Epistle to the Romans, existed independently of God—a malignant, personified power that threatened to grip humanity. Mormon leaders evoked descriptions of this sort of evil in tangible detail, moving the struggle far from the abstract or merely spiritual

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Cannon, "Diary Excerpts of Abraham H. Cannon." Thursday, November 9, 1893. L. Tom Perry Special Collections and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

10 Eliza R. Snow Smith, *The Family Record of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: *Deseret News*, 1884), 475.

realm into the physical reality of everyday life. Supernatural conflict was for these men neither metaphorical nor very distant; indeed, leaders took care to bring it home to every Saint. Joseph Smith described the armies of Satan as "wicked men and angels of devils and all the infernal powers of darkness" who sought to destroy the church, and with whom the Saints must be constantly "warring the Christian warfare." Young claimed that "every person who desires and strives to be a Saint is closely watched by fallen spirits . . . they are visiting the human family with various manifestations."[11]

Moreover, these struggles were not to be understood as mere temptation to sin. Rather, they could be very physical, even involving hand-to-hand combat. Heber Kimball told stories of very real battles with the forces of Satan—battles as much physical as spiritual, perhaps more so. He told rapt Utah audiences of the trials visited upon him during his mission in England, describing "legions of wicked spirits . . . as plain as I now see you, and they came as near to me as you now are . . . they came to me as I was laying hands upon Brother Russell, the wicked spirits got him to the door of the room." Kimball said that when he shared these experiences with Joseph Smith, the prophet "told me that he had contests with the devil, face to face. He also told me how he was handled and afflicted by the devil, and said, he had known circumstances where Elder Rigdon was pulled out of bed three times in one night."[12] Jedidiah Grant told listeners that Joseph Smith was given "revelations showing him the power of

11 Philip Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 220–29; Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 5:141; Brigham Young, September 1, 1859, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1854–86), 7:237; W. Paul Reeve, "'As Ugly as Evil' and 'As Wicked as Hell': Gadianton Robbers and the Legend Process Among the Mormons," *Journal of Mormon History* 27 (Autumn 2001): 132. On Paul's conception of sin as an external force rather than a human action, see, among other verses, Romans 5:13: "Before the law was given, sin was in the world," and 7:15–17: "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate to do . . . it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me" (New International Version). See also Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 190–192.

12 Heber C. Kimball, March 2, 1856, *Journal of Discourses*, 3:229–230.

Lucifer, the opposite of good, that he might be aware of the strength of his opponent."[13] The physical nature of supernatural evil, a feature largely absent in the present church, provided Patten's story of Cain with an audience whose worldview was prepared to accept it.

Indeed, the leaders of the early church even seemed to revel in the spiritual battles that tales such as Patten's described, for, as Grant said, "When the kingdom of God is on the earth, you may expect to see a special display or manifestation of the opposite to the Gospel . . . then the priesthood of the devil may be seen operating, for he has got one."[14] The Saints, perhaps, were pleased with the idea that they had brought Satan from hiding; it meant that the kingdom was rising as it should. Upon offering an oration over the cornerstone of the Salt Lake Temple in 1853, John Young said, "I very well know that, at the commencement of the Temples that have heretofore been built in the name of the Lord, by this people, the devil has always moved his artillery with greater power and activity at that time . . . I pray that we shall all feel nerved up with power to accomplish the great and glorious work we are called to perform."[15] David Patten's Cain provided the Saints with a clear and definable supernatural antagonist, thus, perhaps paradoxically, underscoring the truth of the work Cain sought to destroy.

Indeed, one of the most famous and well-documented encounters with Cain explicitly placed him in the role that John Young described. The archives of the LDS Church hold a paper marked "from the papers of E. Wesley Smith," president of the Hawaii mission in 1921, when the Laie Hawaii Temple was dedicated. The night before the dedication, Smith had a strange visitor.

> A man came through the door. He was tall enough to have to stoop to enter. His eyes were very protruding and rather wild looking, his fingernails were thick and long. He presented a rather unkempt appearance and wore no clothing at all . . . There suddenly appeared in [Smith's] right hand a light which had the size and appearance of a dagger . . . a voice said "This is your priesthood." He commanded the person in the name of the Lord

13 Jedidiah Grant, February 19, 1854, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:10.

14 Jedidiah Grant, February 19, 1854, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:12.

15 John Young, April 6, 1853, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:40.

> Jesus Christ to depart . . . immediately when the light appeared the person stopped and on being commanded to leave, he backed out the door.[16]

A shaken Wesley contacted his brother Joseph Fielding Smith, then an apostle, who identified the apparition as "Cain . . . whose curse is to roam the earth seeking whom he may destroy." Joseph Fielding then echoed John Young's themes almost exactly, describing Cain as a representative of "the spirit of the adversary," of which there was "always unusual evidence . . . for a period just prior to the dedication of every temple." In a final touch, Joseph directed his brother to "a little book written by Lycurgus A. Wilson on the life of David W. Patten" for further investigation into the matter.[17] Here, then, is perhaps the classic conception of Cain; identifying him as a physical presence on the earth, an incarnation of supernatural evil sent by Satan, whose primary role is to undo the work of the church.

The motif of Cain attempting to disrupt the work of the Saints is echoed throughout the legends. One 1984 tale spoke of a nameless apostle from the 1920s, whose car had broken down while he was in Mexico "checking up on the mission there." While walking through the desert to find help, the apostle encountered "a very large man about 7 feet tall and very dark and harry [*sic*] coming towards him . . . The Apostle asked him who he was. This man said he was Caine [*sic*] . . . [and tried] to over power [the Apostle] . . . the Apostle cast him out with the authority of the Priesthood."[18] Another tale, collected in 1961, described

> a devout young man who had just recently been called to the office of Bishop. One evening while this man was working late into the night he began to feel as if something was wrong . . . a monstrous tall dark figure covered with black hair walked in [to his office] . . . this figure had the appearance of what one would think Cain to have had . . . the Bishop had the feeling that its intent was to destroy him . . . he called out "By the

16 [15] "Experiences with Cain," n.d., manuscript 5273, Church and Family History Archives, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

17 Ibid.

18 Folk Collection 8a, Group 7, Box 3, 1.1.4.3.10.1, Fife Folklore Archives.

> authority of the priesthood and the power of God I command you to leave!"[19]

The protagonists of these stories embody similar motifs—a dedicated servant of the church on its business, whom Cain seeks to destroy. And as one might expect, mission officials and missionaries seem to be the most frequent target for Cain; aside from more prominent mission workers like our unnamed apostle, E. Wesley Smith, and David Patten himself, common, and often unnamed, missionaries have been plagued by Cain as well. One story from the 1970s tells of "two boys from the Bear River Valley who had just received their mission calls . . . while they were riding they saw a big hairy creature. It spooked their horses . . . They went to their stake president . . . he then told them it was Cain." Another story, collected in 1998, describes a giant "Cain-beast which chased two elders to their car."[20]

The ease with which E. Wesley Smith or the unnamed bishop and apostle dispatched Cain echoes nineteenth-century themes of spiritual warfare; in these tales, God's power is pitted directly against Satan's in the form of Cain and triumphs. Similarly, Cain presented little resistance to David Patten when that apostle commanded him "in the name of Jesus Christ and by the virtue of the Holy priesthood" to leave; Patten said "he immediately departed out of my sight."[21] Both the unnamed apostle and bishop of the earlier stories were able to banish Cain through their priesthood authority as well. Cain is interpreted here through the lens of Mormon culture, represented as a player on the distinctly Mormon battleground of Joseph Smith's restoration, and understood through the sacred history that Mormonism wrote for itself. The tales already mentioned engage

19 Folk Collection 8a, Group 7, Box 3, 1.1.4.3.2.1 Fife Folklore Archives.

20 Folk Collection 8, Box 73, 01-041, Lisa Larson, collector, Fife Folklore Archives; "A Night at the Canyon," Whitney Belcher, collector, Wilson Folklore Archives 2204, Perry Special Collections. Interestingly, though the physical manifestations of evil in everyday life that Young and Smith spoke of seem to have largely departed from day-to-day church life, the mission field remains one area in which such legends can still be found. See William Wilson's examples of black horsemen and demonic possession in "On Being Human: The Folklore of Mormon Missionaries," *New York Folklore* 8 (Winter 1982): 5–27.

21 Lycurgus A. Wilson, *Life of David W. Patten,* 47.

this motif through overt supernatural conflict between Cain and the power of God. However, other tales complicate the neatness of this narrative, for within the borders of Mormon folklore, Cain is not just any demon. It is true that perhaps the single most frequent use of the word "Cain" in the legends and folk doctrine of the LDS Church has been in association with the concept of a "curse" of dark skin, a mark of spiritual inferiority and, until 1978, the inability to hold the priesthood. Patten's story, Snow's poem, and several of the other stories so far discussed used the word "dark," or less frequently, "black" to describe Cain physically. Describing Cain as the progenitor of a cursed race is another way in which Mormon folklore has used Cain to explain evil.

A case in point is the following tale, retold by William Wilson and Richard Poulson:

> Missionaries tracting . . . a white section of a town in Georgia were surprised when a huge black Negro came to the door and hurled obscenities at them. His mein [sic] was hideous, and the missionaries left, much frightened. Their mission president later told them that the man had been Cain, that the town was very wicked, and that they should no longer labor there.[22]

This story presents a number of problems. First, it is one of the few in which our heroes essentially back down in the face of Cain—even the authoritative figure of the mission president seems to back down without a confrontation of the type that Wesley Smith endured. He is reminiscent of the stake president who told the two horseback-riding missionaries who their persecutor was—but that earlier story ended there, and the sense is that in the naming, that stake president seized control of the situation, and the implication is that those two young men fulfilled their missions despite Cain's efforts. Here, however, naming Cain seems a surrender to him. Perhaps is was meant to, given the strong racial overtones in this story—with more details that imply race, such as the word "Negro" and the specific setting of Georgia, than any other gathered for this study. Perhaps the surrender to Cain reflected the church's struggle at

22 William Wilson and Richard Poulson, "The Curse of Cain and Other Stories: Blacks in Mormon Folklore," *Sunstone* 5 (November/December 1980): 9–13.

the time of the civil rights movement, when the story was collected, a period of awkward transition in which the church was confronting its own racial assumptions.

It is undeniable, of course, that the association of darkness or black skin with evil has ancient roots, far older than Mormonism. In early America, the Puritans called the very present devil that haunted them the "Black Man."[23] However, it is also true that the Mormon belief system, after its way of developing theology or pseudotheology to explain virtually every practice or speculation, has produced a number of theories that associate a dark-skinned Cain not only with evil but with the African race, widely believed to be his descendants.[24] John Taylor, third president of the church, preached that Cain's descendants were preserved through the flood because "it was necessary that the devil should have a representation on Earth as well as God," language that in context implicated Africans and African Americans. Associations like Taylor's clearly place Cain's identification as the first black man hand in hand with the traditional depiction of Cain as a representative of the adversary; both represent a challenge to the work of God. Cain's dark skin is a supernatural brand, a mark of the demonic, and the need for confrontation is no less present. Wilson and Poulson note, "One of the stories current among nineteenth century Mormons was that when people apostatized from the church, their skin darkened." Conversely, they note that "some tales tell us that when blacks join the Church their skin lightens." This is merely David Patten banishing Cain in more gen-

23 See, for example, Timothy McMillan, "Black Magic: Witches, Race, and Resistance in Colonial New England," *Journal of Black Studies* 25 (September 1994): 107–8. Nathaniel Hawthorne also uses the term in *The Scarlet Letter* (Boston: Ticknor, 1850), 92. For racial Cain folklore in a broader American context, see Stephen Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford, 2002).

24 [23] Mark Leone, *The Roots of Modern Mormonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 168. Leone calls Mormonism a "do-it-yourself theology," saying that "Mormons create their own theology and philosophy in the literal sense, and in the context of the church they work out for themselves most of the problems faced in life." Leone's argument that generalized church doctrine is adapted by members to deal with specific situations applies here to the adaptation of Cain folklore to changing cultural emphases.

eralized language; black skin in the stories described here is as much a sign of a tangible source of opposition to the work of God as an appearance of Cain himself.[25]

The resurrection of Cain in the folklore of Mormondom, then, has been a complicating factor for a religion often unsure of how to deal with converts of African descent. Cain has been presented as being not merely the long-past forefather of a "cursed" race but a current supernatural, demonic figure actively hostile to the ongoing growth of the church. This has served to emphasize and reinforce sentiments of fear and racism and has strengthened the image of the African race as not only the descendants of the first murderer, but as somehow inherently evil due to that association. The Cain of the stories is often monstrous and occasionally pitiable (particularly in Patten's account), but almost always he is presented as more demon than man, twisted by evil, unredeemably subhuman, and, as he told David Patten, "a very miserable creature . . . [who] could not die," though he sought death; in other words, beyond salvation. It is a profoundly negative image, and one which cannot help but damage how the church and its members interact with those people named Cain's children for more than a century.

Is this association changing? There is, perhaps, evidence that it is, following the social and cultural transitions that have occurred since the 1978 revocation of the ban on men of African descent holding the priesthood. Ironically, it may be the very monstrous image Cain is given that has sparked the transformation of that image—from the archetypal, cursed black man to Bigfoot, a figure more animal than man, lacking the weight of nineteenth-century Mormon demonology. Though the stories seldom do much to rehabilitate Cain's image—he is still hostile—the emphasis of the legends shifts. The older stories—those from Patten's own experience through the third quarter of the twentieth century—stress Cain's curse. He often speaks, telling the person he encounters of his inability to die or his status as a vagabond; he is presented as an agent of Satan and hell and must be driven off by Saints holding the priesthood power of God. Newer legends, however, gathered in the 1980s and 1990s, depict a

25 John Taylor, August 28, 1881, *Journal of Discourses*, 22:304; Wilson and Poulson, "Curse of Cain," 14.

blurring of the line between Cain and Bigfoot; a de-emphasis of elements like the curse and supernatural evil in favor of the more mundane horror of a bestial Bigfoot. Cain now rarely speaks; his specific mission to destroy the church has dissolved into the general hostility that one would expect from a wild animal, and the theme of supernatural confrontation has faded. Perhaps not coincidentally, events in American folklore in general, and Mormon country in particular, that surrounded the 1978 revocation of the priesthood ban provided the legend cycle with a new template.

In October 1967, a man named Roger Patterson filmed thirty seconds of eight-millimeter footage near Bluff Creek in northern California. The film shows a large, heavy, hair-covered creature loping away from the camera. At one point, it turns and stares into the lens before vanishing into the forest. As prominent Bigfoot researcher John Green argues, the film "changed everything." Older stories of Bigfoot, Green notes, speak of "hairy wild men," and often "don't make a clear division between the 'real' and the 'supernatural.'" Indeed, students of Bigfoot lore regularly trace the beast's ancestry back to such beings as Grendel of *Beowulf*, the Green Man of medieval legends, and the Wendigo and skinchangers who haunted Native Americans. Thus, though the precision of David Patten's identification of Cain is unusual, the paranormal mood surrounding the beast was not. This sort of monstrous legendry has often been reflected in the sinister, diabolical overtones in the more famous Bigfoot stories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A good example is that recounted by future president Theodore Roosevelt in his 1893 *The Wilderness Hunter*. Roosevelt referred to it as a "goblin-story" he heard from an old hunter named Bauman, a window into the world of "spectres, and the formless evil beings that haunt the forest depths, and dog and waylay the lonely wanderer." Specifically, in this case Bauman and his traveling companion were stalked through the "primeval forest" and ambushed by a huge, fanged, hair-covered "monstrous assailant" who overcame Bauman's companion and "buried its teeth in his throat. It had not eaten the body but apparently had romped and gambolled around it in uncouth, ferocious glee, occasionally rolling over and over it; then it had fled back into the soundless depths of the woods." Roosevelt

concluded by speculating on the identity of "this half human or half devil, some great goblin-beast."[26]

With the impact of the Patterson film, however, Green—and other observers—argue that a parallel understanding of Bigfoot, scientific rather than supernatural, has emerged. Bigfoot researcher Loren Coleman noted another milestone, maintaining that the publication of Janet and Colin Bord's 1982 *The Bigfoot Casebook* solidified a trend that "put hominology back on track." "Hominology" is Coleman's term for the scientific study of Bigfoot and other bipedal primates such as the yeti—a nearly forty-year school of thought that has reshaped the course of Bigfoot mythology in America. While for many, Bigfoot remains what he always was—a sometimes supernatural monster characterized with the sort of frightful language Roosevelt used—the language of science has begun to seep into the legendry. Green cites several conclusions that can be drawn from a consideration of the evidence—Bigfoot is, for example, nocturnal, omnivorous, and solitary. Though most sightings report "bluffing or threatening" behavior, "only a very few" describe actual injury—similar to encounters with other primates. Most importantly, Green concludes, "they are not some kind of wild humans"—Bigfoot, in short, is an animal, to be studied as any other species. This is reflected in the growing literature on Bigfoot—books with titles such as *Big Footprints: A Scientific Inquiry into the Reality of Sasquatch* and *A Field Guide to the Sasquatch* continually roll off the presses. Even the use of the name "Sasquatch" is gaining on the far more popular "Bigfoot." Green notes this with enthusiasm, for "Sasquatch" implies a far more serious attitude than "Bigfoot." Both Coleman and folklorist Linda Milligan have recently noted the decline of older stories that associated Bigfoot (inappropriately, researchers such as Green believe) with UFOs. Indeed, Milligan argues for the influence "of the published debate on the thinking of active bearers of the legend"—that the Bigfoot researchers have drawn

26 John Green, "The Historical Overview and Basic Facts Involved in the Bigfoot or Sasquatch Investigation," *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 18 (Winter 2004): 37–53. On Bigfoot ancestors, see Robert Michael Pyle, *Where Bigfoot Walks: Crossing the Dark Divide* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 3–8; Theodore Roosevelt, *The Wilderness Hunter* (New York: Putnam, 1893), 273–282.

the popular legend toward naturalism through emphasizing the importance of evidence—footprints, pieces of hair, specific physical description, and the like.[27]

A specific Utah example illustrates these trends emerging in a Mormon context. On Sunday afternoon, February 3, 1980, a South Weber, Utah, high school student named Pauline Markham glanced out of her kitchen window and saw what she identified as "a big, black creature" climbing down a mountain ridge a half mile away. Markham, a Mormon, reported that she simply put her water glass down and "went to church." Early the next morning, her cousin, Ronald Smith, saw a "big dark figure" in his field. He fled into the house, leaving an agitated horse in the pasture. The next morning, odd tracks in the snow had been trampled by hoofprints. The story was pursued by Jay Barker, an *Ogden Standard-Examiner* reporter who himself claimed to have encountered Bigfoot three years earlier. At this point in 1980, none of the principals—particularly Markham, who is clearly identified as a practicing Mormon, and Barker, who devoted a great deal of investigation to the events—seem to have associated Bigfoot with Cain. Indeed, all seem to have taken a particularly naturalistic approach to the phenomenon—Smith compared the sound made by the creature he encountered to a cougar, while Barker speculated that sightings faded because Bigfoot "returned to the mountains with its young" and spoke of the "paw prints" it left. He initially "thought he was looking at an elk"—a mistake that one cannot really

27 Loren Coleman, "The Bigfoot Casebook, A Classic Renewed for the Ages," foreword to *The Bigfoot Casebook Updated: Sightings and Encounters from 1818–2004*, by Janet and Colin Bord (Enumclaw, WA: Pinewoods Press, 2005); Green, "Historical Overview," 37–8. Some other examples of scientific Bigfoot study are Grover Krantz, *Big Footprints: A scientific Inquiry into the Reality of Sasquatch* (Boulder: Johnson Books, 1992); David Gordon, *A Field Guide to Sasquatch.* (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 1992); and Linda Milligan, "The 'Truth' about the Bigfoot Legend," Western Folklore 49 (1990): 83–98. There is also evidence that Mormon Cain stories have begun to enter the consciousness of mainstream Bigfoot research; see, for instance, the discussion in Joshua Buhs, *Bigfoot: The Life and Times of a Legend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 196–97, which contextualizes Patten's encounter with other Christians who used supernatural interpretations of Bigfoot to preserve a spiritual worldview against encroaching science.

imagine David Patten making. Another man, Sterling Gardner, compared what he believed to be the stench of Bigfoot that agitated his dogs to a "skunk." However, ten years after the fact, local historian Lee D. Bell noted that South Weber citizens had begun associating "their" Bigfoot with Cain soon after these sightings, and twenty-three years later, the *Deseret News* would pinpoint this event as the genesis of what it called "the Bigfoot/Cain idea." Of course, it is always wise to exercise caution when speculating about turning points in legend cycles, particularly when they are so specific in time and place. However, whether the South Weber sightings did in fact drive changes in Cain folklore, the motifs of these encounters illustrate a new path in the legend cycle. They followed on the heels of the repudiation of the seed-of-Cain doctrine implied by the revocation of the priesthood ban, and their overriding naturalism is representative of how Cain is now described—a monster, perhaps, but one stripped of the supernatural qualities that defined him to Patten and those storytellers of his tradition.[28]

Stories gathered during the 1990s for the folklore archives of Brigham Young University and Utah State University stress the features that make Cain Bigfoot rather than those that might make Bigfoot Cain. That is, they emphasize Cain's "big hairy" appearance, describe him in terms appropriate for animals, and make him less tormented and cursed, and more bestial. Encounters with him are stripped of any overt confrontation between the demonic and the divine and instead generally end with one party or the other running away. A representative modern story, though more lengthy than most, concerns

> a group of Boy Scouts [who were] on a camping trip when they heard strange noises. It was Cain, who chased them through the woods and into a cabin. They locked the door, but Cain tried to

28 On Markham's and Smith's encounters, see John Harrington, "Did Bigfoot Visit Small Davis Town? Citizens Buzz," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, February 12, 1980. On Barker's, see Bert Strand, "8 Hikers Spot Elusive Bigfoot in High Uintahs," *Ogden Standard-Examiner,* August 25, 1977. Also, Monte Whaley, "Legend of Bigfoot May Be All South Weber Has Left," *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 6, 1996, and "Living in Utah," *Deseret News*, July 24, 2003. Lee D. Bell makes many of the same points about the proprietary attitude with which South Weber Mormons approach "their" Bigfoot in *South Weber: The Autobiography of One Utah Community* (Salt Lake City: K/P Printing, 1990), 513–20.

> climb through the chimney . . . The boys prayed, then got the idea to light a fire in the fireplace. The boy who lit the fire saw a big hairy man's face in the fireplace right before it went up in flames. Later they saw Cain running across the field yelping in pain.[29]

This story, collected in 1997, exhibits the main thrusts of newer legends. While the identity of Cain is never questioned, he is depicted—in his seemingly motiveless pursuit, his roof climbing and his "yelping" through the fields—as much more a natural predator than a supernatural emissary of Satan. Indeed, though the prayer offered seems to suggest a ready-made doorway into the sort of mystical confrontation between the priesthood and the powers of Satan that characterizes almost every earlier story, the opportunity is not taken. Rather, the Scouts (appropriately, perhaps) defeat Cain through practical, rational means suitable for a less demon-haunted age. And the question of Cain's lineage or skin color is never mentioned at all. He is described solely as "big [and] hairy," sans the usual third qualifier—black.

Other stories develop several of these themes. A 1998 tale tells of a giant "Cain-beast," a phrase which emphasizes the brutish nature of this legend's Cain, who, with no attempt at communication, simply "chased two elders to their car." Another collected in the same year tells of Cain stalking an old man's farmhouse late at night. It emphasizes Cain's fright potential, telling us that "two horses . . . died in the night from heart attacks because they were so afraid," and depicts Cain himself reacting as any other predatory animal would, fleeing when the disturbed animals awaken the farmer. A similar story describes the teller's grandfather, who late at night looked out his window and "saw a big huge hairy man looking in at him." The grandfather immediately closed the blinds and, upon reopening, "saw a huge hairy beast running across his fields. He believed this man to be Bigfoot." Interestingly, the text of the story never identifies Bigfoot with Cain explicitly; the teller, however, introduced it as the "grandfather's experience with Bigfoot/Cain." This is a particularly dramatic example of the growing interchangeability of the two figures in the legend cycle,

29 Supernatural Religious Legends, 1.1.4.3.14.1, Wilson Folklore Archives.

a situation reinforced by the content of the legends themselves. Cain's new activities of stalking barns and running through fields seem far less satanically malicious than David Patten's Cain or the gigantic demon that stalked E. Wesley Smith—and, indeed, are strikingly reminiscent of the story of Ronald Smith's horse and the figure in his field.[30] In these ways, the doctrinal didacticism of earlier legends—of Snow's poem, of Joseph Fielding Smith's instruction to his brother—is downplayed, and Cain himself becomes less a supernatural fiend and more the stock monster of any number of campfire tales; less a damned soul, and more Bigfoot.

Other recent tales further this transition by de-emphasizing or distorting older theological issues surrounding Cain's own origins. One 1998 story rejects the traditional curse entirely, instead ascribing Bigfoot to an "Indian spirit that turns into a hairy Cain-like creature." Another collected in 1990 mentions the curse, but muddles the racial issue involved, stating that the informant "learned in Seminary that [Cain] was cursed to not die and walk the Earth all Mongoloidy." Notably, neither of these stories associates Cain with Africans, nor do they ascribe to him demonic motives of overthrowing the church. One 1997 story illustrates the new trends of Cain's racial identity with noteworthy precision: "A long time ago, maybe Brigham Young's day, he [presumably Young] was in a carriage when he saw a big, I mean huge black man. Not like we think of a black man, but his whole countenance was dark and black." This story seeks to preserve the original flavor of the Cain cycle's imagery but, in explicitly disassociating Cain from black human beings, also makes it clear that the conceptions underpinning that flavor have changed. In addition, none of the stories mentioned in the past few paragraphs use any racial language at all to describe Cain. In recent years, then, it seems that the theological issues of race and damnation have been downplayed in favor of the fright potential of the legend and association with traditional campfire fare such as "Indian spirits."[31]

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30 Folk Collection 8, Box 73, 01-041, Lisa Larson, collector, Fife Folklore Archives; "A Night at the Canyon," Whitney Belcher, collector, Wilson Folklore Archives 1-2204.

31 "A Night at the Canyon," Whitney Belcher, collector, Wilson Folklore Archives 2204; Folk Collection 8a, Group 2, Box 12, 18.1.21.1, Fife Folklore Archives;

A 1997 story provides us with a fascinating retelling of David Patten's encounter with Cain that demonstrates in short what the Cain cycle has become. The teller begins by stating the source of the tale to be Kimball's *Miracle of Forgiveness* but then goes on to tell a story much different in the details from Smoot's record of Patten's tale: "During the early days of the Church in New York state, a brother was riding his horse through a thicket of wood when he came across an extremely tall, frighteningly hairy creature roaming through the trees. This monster-like form stopped the man and told him that he was Cain . . . Because of this spotting, many members of the Church believe that Cain is Bigfoot." While this story and Patten's affirm several similar details about Cain—the height, the hairiness—the modern version leaves out Patten's observation of dark skin and replaces it with adjectives such as "frighteningly" and "monster-like." In addition, this story leaves out Cain's description of his diabolical mission, and Patten's exorcism of him. In short, the racial and religious issues at stake are downplayed; the tale has become a horror story whose point is the identification of Cain with the modern monster Bigfoot.

One modern story seems to buck all these trends. It was collected in 1983 from, the collector writes, "my seminary teacher," and by implication was an experience of the teacher—it was told "in first person" (though retold here by the student in the third), and as the student reported, the teacher hoped to use the story "to teach us not to play with Ouiga [*sic*] boards."

> A group of teenaged boys were playing with a ouija board. They were asking simple, fun questions. One of them had the idea to take the board to the graveyard . . . After a while they started asking deeper questions. One boy asked, "Can we see Cane [sic]?" The ouija board answered yes. All of a sudden a huge black man was standing on the hill . . . Everyone was scared, so they ran to their car with the black man in hot persuit [sic]. The guy driving screeched away, and then drove everybody home . . . The next morning he had decided that it never

Supernatural Religious Legends 1.1.4.3.15.1, Wilson Folklore Archives. For the 1997 story, Supernatural Religious Legends, 1.1.4.3.11.1, Wilson Folklore Archives.

happened, but at breakfast his mom asked why he kept coming and going the night before.[32]

This legend seems to violate the general shift outlined in the last few paragraphs; it identifies Cain as a "black man" and has definite overtones of the supernatural, including the graveyard setting and the Ouija board. It seems as though it would play well with those Saints who told each other David Patten's story decades earlier than 1983. It is important to note that the teller was a seminary teacher in 1983, a generation older than the student who recorded it. This may explain the presence of the word "black" rather than "dark" or "hairy," several years after the revocation of the priesthood ban. Additionally, the ban was only five years in the past, making this story's use of "black" a worthwhile contrast to 1990s rhetoric of "Mongoloidy" or "hairy."

As important, however, are the understated features of this tale, which reveal a subtle shift away from the nineteenth-century understanding of supernatural evil. Though the story stresses the supernatural beyond many contemporary legends, as in them, Cain never speaks. In fact, his actions reflect a more contemporary concern with fright—he simply chases people. There is no confrontation or wielding of the priesthood to deter him. Further, Cain is neither the focus nor the source of the supernatural in the story—that position is reserved for the Ouija board. Indeed, though this tale's imagery is a throwback to the nineteenth-century coupling of Cain with demonic evil, it deals with the nature of that evil in very different ways than older legends did. Most apparently, Cain does not appear in his own right, as a supernatural persecutor; he is not set up as a challenger to the growing kingdom of God. Indeed, it is important that the protagonists are not engaged in anything so laudable as missionary work. Rather, Cain enters the story in response to what the storyteller perceives as dangerous, negative behavior—Cain here is a warning or even a punishment for wrong action. He is summoned by human wickedness, rather than appearing independently. It is important to notice the buildup of the story: the progression from "simple, fun questions" to the graveyard, to the fateful question,

32 Folk Collection 8a, Group 7, Box 3, 2.4.1.5.20.1 Fife Folklore Archives.

"Can we see Cane?" What is being dramatized here is the slippery slope, a classic rhetorical device in Mormonism used to warn against sin. It is a series of poor decisions on the parts of the protagonists that leads to their fate, not the aggression of Satan. Therefore, evil is internalized, understood as error on the part of humanity, rather than as an external force in its own right. It is not Pauline in the way that nineteenth-century Mormon evil was. This story, then, alters the nineteenth-century Cain to fit twentieth-century theology just as surely as transforming him into the mindless, brutish Bigfoot did.

Many historians have noted the diminished role that overt manifestations of the supernatural have played in Mormonism since the nineteenth century. A prime example is Thomas Alexander's discussion of the "routinization" of "gifts of the Spirit," the discouragement of their exercise outside the lines of church structure.[33] The transformation of Cain into Bigfoot is illustrative of this trend. The supernatural overtones of the nineteenth-century Cain are not repudiated; the basic supernatural premises of his state and its resulting affirmation of biblical truth are preserved. Even if he is made over as Bigfoot, Cain is after all still presumed to be real, first of all, and second, still alive, as Genesis implies. This is similar to the preservation of the power of gifts of the spirit, such as healing—power that any Mormon would strongly defend, despite the removal of the Pentecostal-style spontaneity that once accompanied it. While the supernatural is preserved, however, its borders are reframed and reduced. In the new Cain, the power of the malevolent supernatural is severely curtailed, not only through the fading of overt demonology from Cain's story, but also through the severance of his link with Africa. Both these developments reflect a new, largely intangible, conception of evil. No longer can it be located on a specific continent or its residue be seen on skin. Similarly, no longer are Saints warned of, as Brigham Young said, demons "visiting the human family with various manifestations." Importantly, however, the basic supernatural premise of Cain's existence, and the network of religious assumptions that rest upon it—that of the validity of the Bible, the literality of Adam and Eve, and even the existence of an

33 Thomas Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 290–98.

interventionist God—remain unquestioned. If Cain is removed as one of these demonic manifestations, if he is no longer representative of a material, aggressive, Pauline conception of evil, his transformation into Bigfoot allows the supernaturalism of his story to persevere, and that of Mormonism to be affirmed.

3

"As Ugly as Evil" and "As Wicked as Hell"

Gadianton Robbers and the Legend Process among the Mormons[1]

W. Paul Reeve

On a spring day in 1874, carpenter Charles Pulsipher busied himself putting the finishing touches on a new home in the town of Hebron in southwestern Utah. Things were likely calm and pleasant as Pulsipher went about his work in this small Mormon ranching community, rooted in the south end of the Escalante Desert in Washington County. Suddenly William McElprang, the young man under Pulsipher's charge, changed all that. McElprang "started in an instant run across the lot, jumped the fence and went up the mountain like a wild man." Pulsipher sprinted after him, "but it was not in the power of mortals to catch him." When McElprang's strength finally failed, Pulsipher brought him back to town, but only "by faith in the Lord and the power of the priesthood."

Apparently McElprang had been afflicted by "evil spirits" for about two weeks. When these demons overpowered him, they caused "terrible pain most of the time" and occasionally "tried to run him wild into the mountains." John Pulsipher, Charles's brother, stood guard over the young man one night and described the principal spirit that possessed him as "a very stubborn dumb sort of a fellow." However, on this particular night, "a very raving noisy spirit got possession of

1 A version of this essay was originally published in the *Journal of Mormon History* 27 (Autumn 2001): 125–49.

him which when ordered to tell his name said it was 'Suzi Borem.'" Upon learning this, John promptly rebuked Suzi and cast her out, and she "returned no more"; but the "old stubborn fellow" continued to plague McElprang until finally the townspeople gave up. They took him to Cedar City, over forty-five miles northeast, to live with his father.[2] Three other young people at Hebron—Orson Welcome Huntsman, James Wilkins, and Adelia Terry—experienced similar demons on different occasions.

Evil spirits were not the only problem Hebronites faced as they struggled to tame a small corner of Brigham Young's kingdom. The town was located on the rim of the Great Basin, at an altitude of 5,400 feet, and its cool climate seemed to weaken some settlers' resolve. Juanita Brooks, for example, recalled hearing her father remark that his boyhood home at Hebron "wasn't exactly a paradise," adding that "it was so cold, too cold to raise fruit and garden stuff." Concurring, Brooks's grandmother added, "that place was not intended to be for human beings, only cattle and sheep."[3] Because Hebron was perched on a piece of high ground where the two branches of Shoal Creek merged and the main stream curved in a big bend, the settlers suffered most from a lack of water. When Erastus Snow, apostle and leader of the Cotton Mission, looked over the selected townsite, he prophetically warned that it would be too difficult to get water there—and it was. Over the years, residents built flumes, ditches, canals, and dams, none of which proved successful at keeping Hebron irrigated. Economically, Hebron was a ranching outpost, and for any but the

2 Hebron Ward Record, 1872–97, 3:39–40, photocopy of holograph, Enterprise Branch, Washington County Library, Enterprise, Utah. Different versions of Hebron's bout with demons have previously been published as Reeve, "Evil Spirits Plagued the Residents of Hebron, Utah" as part of the "History Blazer," a joint project of the Utah State Historical Society and the Utah Statehood Centennial Commission; and as Reeve, *A Century of Enterprise: The History of Enterprise, Utah, 1896–1996* (Enterprise, UT: City of Enterprise, 1996), 16–17; and Reeve, "Cattle, Cotton, and Conflict: The Possession and Dispossession of Hebron, Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 67 (Spring 1999): 148–75.

3 Juanita Brooks, *Quicksand and Cactus: A Memoir of the Southern Mormon Frontier,* 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1982; Logan: Utah State University Press, 1992), 43. Brooks's father was Dudley Henry Leavitt; the grandmother referred to was Mary Huntsman Leavitt.

core families who relied upon livestock for their living, it offered little inducement to stay.

Battles over land, death by neglect, the enticements of non-Mormon mining towns, power conflicts, family feuds, fires, and floods also conspired against Hebronites. Despite this overwhelming string of hardships, residents clung to their tiny community, refusing to accept failure until an earthquake in 1902 shook them to their senses. The quake rendered most homes unsafe, and talk in town centered on moving elsewhere. Still, Hebronites stubbornly persisted until June 1903, when St. George ecclesiastical authorities visited the beleaguered town and "honorably released" its residents, thereby facilitating its abandonment by around 1905.[4]

Given the degree of challenges settlers faced, their reluctance to move is perplexing. On the surface, many residents were holding out for a monetary settlement with the nearby Enterprise Reservoir and Canal Company over their water rights. But beyond this consideration, their tenacity masked an underlying anxiety about the fog of disunity that had blanketed the town almost from its founding in 1868. The religious nature of Mormon settlement efforts equated success with piety and failure with a lack of devotion to God and the cause of Zion. Perhaps in an effort to make sense of their defeat, some settlers turned to explanations that suggested the situation was beyond their control. While the earthquake, floods, cool climate, lack of water, and disunity best account for Hebron's demise, an intriguing folk legend developed that likely helped settlers cope with the anxiety brought on by that demise. The legend involved Gadianton robbers, a nefarious band of thieves described in the Book of Mormon. Carrie E. L. Hunt, who spent much of her youth at Hebron, recalled it this way: "As a child I remember of hearing the older folks talking about how evil spirits seem to hover about that part of the country. It was the people's belief that way back in history, that strip of country had once been the hideout of the notorious Gadianton Robbers that were so much talked about in history. They felt their spirits still haunted the country."[5]

4 For a more detailed analysis of the factors leading to Hebron's abandonment, see Reeve, "Cattle, Cotton, and Conflict" and *Century of Enterprise*, 3–26, 53–59.

5 Carrie Elizabeth Laub Hunt, *Memories of the Past and Family History* (Salt Lake

This legend's connection to the demonic possession of McElprang and other town youth seems evident; but this and other Gadianton legends, when immersed in an extensive historical context, assume significance beyond the sagebrush streets of this present-day ghost town. The spiritual battle between the forces of good and evil that tormented Hebron encapsulated, on a popular level, the broader war between those same forces manifest in nineteenth-century Mormon theology. Joseph Smith, speaking to the female Relief Society sisters of Nauvoo in 1842, called it "warring the Christian warfare" and warned that "wicked men and angels of devils, and all the infernal powers of darkness" would be continually arrayed against anyone willing to enter the fray.[6]

Gadianton robbers and the meaning they came to embody did not emerge independently from the minds of Hebronites. Events from early Mormon history, mingled with official pronouncements from Brigham Young and other church leaders, created a Gadianton robber persona—a cultural discourse—that Hebronites applied to their troublesome attempt at community building. Furthermore, the transmutation of those robbers from doctrine to legend offers an intriguing case study in what folklorists Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi term the legend process—"the procedure by which legends are being generated, formulated, transmuted, and crystallized by means of communication through the legend conduit." In nineteenth-century Utah, Gadianton robber conduits (the process of legend transmission through a "sequence of individuals who qualify as legend receivers and transmitters"[7]) originated as sermons from the pulpit that were then carried home by Mormon folk and adapted to suit local circumstances. Confined as it was to Mormonism and geographical locales within the Great Basin, that process sent Gadianton narratives spiraling along a variety of conduits, most of which came to rest in southwestern Utah.

City: Utah Printing, 1968), 33.

6 Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 5:141.

7 Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi, "Legend and Belief," in *Folklore Genres,* ed. Dan Ben-Amos (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), 119–23.

Using Hebron as a lens, this study not only explores the possibilities of the legend process in territorial Utah but also posits a plausible community-building function for Gadianton robber legends. As folklorist William A. Wilson suggests, "Narratives shared by members of a like-minded group serve as a mirror for culture" and as a barometer of a group's "principal concerns at any given time." Wilson believes, for example, that good-versus-evil stories told by present-day Mormons function to affirm the validity of the Mormon cause by proving that God is on Mormonism's side. "Thus," Wilson notes, "Mormon tradition is replete with accounts of God fighting Zion's battles," thereby implying that "the church must be true because God protects it and its emissaries from harm."[8]

In general, Gadianton narratives are certainly about good versus evil, but with an intriguing characteristic specific to nineteenth-century Mormons struggling to colonize Zion. In the Gadianton stories that follow, God does not fight Zion's battles; rather, the vile robbers reign supreme and successfully thwart the cause of Zion in a few specific locales. These legends thereby offered anxiety-ridden colonizers an otherworldly scapegoat for their failures to coax blooming roses from the stingy dust of a desert Zion.

The devil and his cohorts have been around since the Garden of Eden. Their typical role has been to menace God's chosen people and attempt to frustrate the divine plan. Jesus himself was not spared Satan's taunts. During his earthly ministry, Jesus not only resisted the temptations of Satan, but cast out devils and taught his disciples to do likewise. As one student of demonology put it, "The whole of Jesus' public ministry in fact revolved around foiling Satan, Beelzebub, Azaziel, or whatever other name the Devil went by."[9]

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8 William A. Wilson, "The Study of Mormon Folklore: An Uncertain Mirror for Truth," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 22 (Winter 1989): 95–110.

9 Gerald Messadié, *A History of the Devil*, trans. Marc Romano, 1996 (New York: Kodansha International, 1993), 253. Messadié notes the difference between the Satan of the Old Testament and the devil of the New Testament. He contends that Jesus passed on to Christianity the Essene concept of the devil rather than the Old Testament Satan. Part of this concept was the basic "Essene idea that only by struggling with the Devil could the coming of the Kingdom of God, the end of time or Apocalypse, be hastened," an idea that certainly resonates with

As Christianity spread throughout Europe, Satan and his legions did too. A fear of the devil, according to historian John L. Brooke, "pervaded medieval Christianity and intensified in the later Middle Ages with mounting demographic, social and political stresses." As Christianity intermixed with paganism, a "host of lay practitioners of magic" claimed power to, among other things, "protect against the devil and his minions."[10] Such folk beliefs and practices were carried from the Old World to the New and pervaded seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century America.

These folk beliefs both shaped and were shaped by the religious traditions of the New World. As historian David D. Hall described it, "the people of seventeenth-century New England lived in an enchanted universe." Their "world of wonders" included ghosts, phantom ships, voices from heaven and from children's cradles, trumpets blaring with no trumpeters, and the sky on a clear day filled with companies of armed men.[11] While New Englanders usually interpreted such manifestations as demonstrations of God's power, they attributed some supernatural events to Satan, including demonic possession. The Salem witch hunt of 1692—the most conspicuous example—required that witches confess the power that the devil had over them.[12]

Such beliefs flickered persistently in the hearts of New England folk into the early nineteenth century, then burst into flames during the Second Great Awakening, a particularly fervent religious revival that engulfed America from ca. 1800 to 1830. The religious fires of this awakening burned nowhere brighter than in upstate New York, a region labeled the "burned over district" for the intensity with which hellfire revivals spread back and forth across it. According to one historian, during this ferment "subterranean folk beliefs and fetishes emerged into the open and blended with traditional Christian practices to create a wildly

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the millenarian nature of *early Mormonism*.

10 John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (1994; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, reprint), 6.

11 David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 71.

12 Ibid., 145.

spreading evangelical enthusiasm."[13] Joseph Smith Jr., the future founder of Mormonism, lived in the middle of this religious excitement and was heavily immersed in the popular religious beliefs of the time. The Smith home, as his brother Hyrum acknowledged, was "a visionary house," in which both parents experienced dreams filled with religious symbolism. Furthermore, Smith and his family, as well as other early Mormon converts, were embedded in a culture that drew upon popular tales of both devils and angels.[14] As D. Michael Quinn asserts, "The first generation of Mormons . . . shared a magic world view that predated Mormonism."[15]

Much has been written concerning the cultural context of the emergence of Mormonism, with particular focus upon treasure hunting, alchemy, revivalism, and heavenly manifestations.[16] It seems evident that the devil also factored into Smith's cultural milieu.[17] In the spring of 1820, immediately preceding the epiphany that set in motion the establishment of his new religion, Smith reported being "seized upon" by "the power of some actual being from the unseen world," which bound his tongue and attempted to destroy him.[18]

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13 Gordon S. Wood, "Evangelical America and *Early Mormonism*," *New York History* 61 (October 1980): 370.

14 See Richard Lyman Bushman, "The Visionary World of Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 37, no. 1 (1997–98): 184; and Brooke, *Refiner's Fire*, 4, 150–51. Brooke establishes a context much broader than the Second Great Awakening and sees the origins of Mormonism in ideas dating back to the Reformation and English Revolution and the attendant fusion between magical ideas and radical religion.

15 D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), x.

16 Ibid.; see also Bushman, "Visionary World"; Brooke, *Refiner's Fire*; Neal E. Lambert and Richard H. Cracroft, "Literary Form and Historical Understanding: Joseph Smith's First Vision," *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980): 31–42; Milton V. Backman Jr., "Awakenings in the Burned-Over District: New Light on the Historical Setting of the First Vision," *BYU Studies* 9 (Spring 1969): 301–17; and Ronald W. Walker, "The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," *BYU Studies* 24 (Fall 1984): 429–59.

17 Quinn, *Early Mormonism,* 101–2, 165–67, 183, 201–2, 205–6, 215, 219, 223, includes belief in devils as a part of Mormonism's magic worldview. For a medical perspective on demons in *early Mormonism*, see Lester E. Bush Jr., *Health and Medicine among the Latter-day Saints: Science, Sense, and Scripture* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1993), especially chapter 5.

18 *History of the Church*, 1:5.

The devil continued to dog Smith and other early Mormons as they preached of a new book of scripture and a restored gospel. In 1830, for example, in an event recorded as "the first miracle in the church," Smith exorcized a demon that twisted and distorted the face and limbs of his friend Newel Knight and tossed him about "most fearfully."[19] Apostle Heber C. Kimball reported hearing from Joseph Smith that during the church's troubled days at Far West, Missouri, in 1838, Smith "saw the devil in person" in "an open vision" and contended with him "face to face, for sometime."[20]

Kimball had had a similar experience himself in 1837 in Preston, England. While attempting to rebuke a devil in Elder Isaac Russell, Kimball's "voice faltered, and his mouth was shut, and he began to tremble and real [*sic*] to and fro, and fell on the floor like a dead man, and uttered a deep groan." Orson Hyde joined Russell, now freed from the spirits, and they successfully exorcized the demons from Kimball. The three missionaries then "distinctly saw the evil spirits who foamed and gnashed upon them with their teeth." Hyde concluded: "The devils are determined to destroy us and prevent the truth from being declared in England."[21] While preaching in Toronto, Canada, Parley P. Pratt, another of the original apostles, encountered a woman afflicted with evil spirits. At times she "would be drawn and twisted in every limb and joint" and would occasionally "groan, scream, [and] froth at the mouth." In such a state, "she often cried out that she could see two devils in human form, who were thus operating upon her, and that she could hear them talk." When Pratt laid hands upon the woman and rebuked the devils, she "remained well from that time forth."[22]

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19 Ibid., 1:82–83.

20 Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball: An Apostle, The Father & Founder of the British Mission*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967), 258–59. See also Alexander L. Baugh, "Parting the Veil: The Visions of Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 38 (Winter 1999): 42.

21 *History of the Church*, 2:503; *Elders' Journal of the Church of Latter Day Saints* [Kirtland, Ohio] 1, no. 1 (October, 1837).

22 Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (1938; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985 printing), 130–31.

Zera (or Zerah) Pulsipher, an early convert to Mormonism and later resident of Hebron, first encountered the devil in upstate New York.[23] Shortly after his conversion, Pulsipher became acquainted with a fellow believer, Dr. Samuel Newcomb, whose brother-in-law, Joseph Hunting (or Hunton) was "possessed with the devil." Hunting's family generally kept him "chained in a tight room" but he occasionally broke free and physically threatened family members. Pulsipher apparently developed a knack for handling the vexed man and continued to help the family control him, even after they all moved to Kirtland, Ohio. On one occasion, following instructions given by Joseph Smith Sr., Pulsipher gathered seven church elders to cast the devil out of Hunting, resulting in six months of freedom from the "raving spell[s]." Then "the devil entered him again." Perplexed, Pulsipher appealed to Father Smith for advice, who warned that if the possessed man's family "would not keep the covenants," they could "all go to Hell together."[24]

Collectively, these experiences demonstrate a belief in evil spirits and demonic possessions among early Mormons. They also illustrate a worldview that included an underlying struggle between the forces of good and evil that openly manifested itself on several occasions. Good, in all these scenarios except the last, triumphed over evil,

23 Quinn, *Early Mormonism*, 94, links Zera's wife, Mary Brown Pulsipher, to a possible "Winchell-Walter association." Justus Winchell and Luman Walter were two men whom Quinn documents as involved in folk magic and possible occult mentors to the Joseph Smith Sr. family and other early Mormon leaders. Ibid., chap. 4.

24 Zera Pulsipher, "History of Zera Pulsipher as Written by Himself," 17–19, typescript, Perry Special Collections. Three other reports of this incident appear in the *Juvenile Instructor:* (1) Ruth W. Tyler, "A Manifestation of God's Power through Fasting and Prayer," 19 (March 15, 1884): 91; (2) Daniel Tyler, "Covenant-Breaking," 19 (April 1, 1884): 102–3; (3) "An Incident Related by Lafayette Granger," 29 (September 15, 1894): 577. While none of these versions mentions Pulsipher, enough details match to corroborate that it is the same incident. The name is given in one version as Hunton, as Joseph Hunting in the other two. The "covenant" the family was breaking was apparently the Word of Wisdom ("Sister Hunting smoked tobacco and drank tea"), according to two versions. One account reports that the entire family eventually "became indifferent to their holy religion and apostatized, and the man who had been so miraculously healed, died a raving maniac."

proving to believers and unbelievers alike the power of God among the adherents of this new American religion.[25] Zera Pulsipher, however, learned from his encounter that the power to cast out devils had its limitations (much like the experience of Jesus's disciples recorded in Matthew 17:20–21) and that the ability to do so was linked to levels of religious devotion, not necessarily in the possessed person, but in his or her community of caregivers. For Pulsipher, this lesson would prove important, especially as it found application at Hebron decades later.

Clearly, the early *history of the church* and the various forces marshaled against it laid a solid foundation for the emergence of a doctrine of evil spirits that in turn bred a closely related array of legends.[26] A few official pronouncements concerning the nature of disembodied spirits and their link to Gadianton robbers likely generated an interplay between doctrine and legend that sent conduits extending in many directions. One of them came to rest at Hebron.

In 1843, Joseph Smith officially explained demonic possession as Satan's vengeance for being cast from heaven without receiving a body:[27] "The punishment of the devil was that he should not have

25 Because the successful exorcism of demons in the Knight and Pratt incidents convinced unbelievers of the validity of Mormonism and advanced missionary work, these two instances of demonic possessions were seen as means to a greater good. *History of the Church*, 1:5 and Pratt, *Autobiography*, 131.

26 From its beginnings, Mormonism engendered intense persecution and animosity. Some Mormons were driven from their homes on several occasions. Some Mormons were murdered in Missouri and the governor of that state issued an extermination order against them. In 1844, an angry mob murdered Joseph Smith, the founder of the new faith. Within two years, the remaining Saints fled Illinois and sought refuge in the semibarren expanses of the Great Basin under the leadership of Brigham Young, Smith's successor. Even though Mormon action and reaction sometimes exacerbated or intensified animosity from outsiders, Mormons tended to view the persecution as evidence of Satan's determination to stop God's chosen people and characterized the struggle as an ongoing battle between the forces of good and evil.

27 As noted in chapter 1, Mormons believe in a premortal war in heaven between two competing plans, one presented by a premortal spirit who would become Satan and the other championed by the premortal spirit of Jesus Christ. As articulated in the Bible, (Revelation 12:7–12) Satan and his followers lost. Their punishment was to be banished from heaven without the possibility of

a habitation like men. The devil's retaliation is, he comes into this world, binds up men's bodies, and occupies them himself. When the authorities come along, they eject him from a stolen habitation."[28] In 1856, Brigham Young expanded this concept in a sermon delivered at Temple Square in Salt Lake City:

> Here the inquiry will naturally arise, when our spirits leave our bodies where do they go to?
>
> I will tell you . . . They do not pass out of the organization of this earth on which we live . . . If the Lord would permit it, and it was His will that it should be done, you could see the spirits that have departed from this world, as plainly as you now see bodies with your natural eyes; as plainly as brothers Kimball and Hyde saw those wicked disembodied spirits in Preston, England. They saw devils there, as we see one another; they could hear them speak, and knew what they said.
>
> We may enquire where the spirits dwell, that the devil has power over? They dwell anywhere, in Preston, as well as in other places in England. Do they dwell anywhere else? Yes, on this continent; it is full of them. If you could see, and would walk over many parts of North America, you would see millions on millions of the spirits of those who have been slain upon this continent.[29]

Young repeated and localized this point a year later in another speech delivered from the Old Tabernacle in Salt Lake City: "There are myriads of disembodied evil spirits—those who have long ago laid down their bodies here and in the regions round about, among and around us; and they are trying to make us and our children sick, and are trying to destroy us and tempt us to evil. They will try every possible means they are masters of to draw us aside from the path of

ever receiving mortal bodies. Those who followed Jesus in the pre-Earth war were then born into mortal bodies, where their earthly sojourn is viewed as a test of their faithfulness to Christian principles. Satan and his minions, as evil spirits, remain determined to thwart Jesus's plan in whatever manner possible.

28 *History of the Church*, 5:403.

29 Brigham Young, June 22, 1856, *Journal of Discourses* (London: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1854–86), 3:367–68. Young continues by describing demonic possession as Joseph Smith had done: as the means for Lucifer and "one-third part of the spirits in heaven," after being cast out of heaven, to obtain physical bodies. Ibid., 368–69.

righteousness."[30] Apostle George Q. Cannon, speaking at Kaysville, Utah, in 1864, attributed a similar doctrine to Joseph Smith:

> I have no doubt that many of my brethren and sisters have sensibly felt in various places and at various times evil influences around them. Brother Joseph Smith gave an explanation of this. There are places in the Mississippi Valley where the influence or the presence of invisible spirits are very perceptibly felt. He said that numbers had been slain there in war, and that there were evil influences or spirits which affect the spirits of those who have tabernacles on the earth . . . I have come to the conclusion that if our eyes were open to see the spirit world around us, we should feel differently on this subject than we do; we would not be so unguarded and careless, and so indifferent whether we had the spirit and power of God with us or not.[31]

Cannon's version of this concept links it to specific locales, much as Brigham Young had done. The Saints readily became aware that Preston (and all of England, America, and specifically the Mississippi Valley) were locations inhabited by evil spirits. But Young also positioned these demons in the midst of his Great Basin Kingdom, saying that they were "here and in the regions round about, among and around us," that they had power to make the Saints ill, and that their purpose was to tempt and destroy them. The battle between good and evil was therefore being waged in the very heart of Zion with an unseen and malignant host. Such a concept almost certainly hardened the resolve of settlers struggling to colonize inhospitable regions but also provided a reasonable explanation for the difficulties they encountered.

At some point, the idea of evil entities inhabiting Zion became entwined with Gadianton robbers. From this foundation, the doctrine could begin transmission outside of official channels, by means of a legend conduit. Linking the evil spirits of the Great Basin to the Gadianton robbers of the Book of Mormon added a scriptural foundation to the emerging doctrine but also endowed the spirits with intense meaning that included the powerful demonic nature of the robbers and their eventual triumph over God's Book of Mormon people.

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30 November 22, 1857, *Journal of Discourses*, 6:73–74.

31 November 13, 1864, *Journal of Discourses*, 11:30.

The Book of Mormon narrative chronicles God's dealings with a branch of Israelites on the American continent from the time of the biblical confounding of the languages to about AD 400. The two principal groups in the story are the Nephites (initially more righteous) and the generally wicked Lamanites. The Nephites eventually forsake their belief in Christ and sink to a level of depravity worse than the Lamanites, at which point God permits their extermination at the hands of the Lamanites. These Lamanites are, according to LDS teachings, the ancestors of the American Indians. The Gadianton robbers were a greed-motivated group of murderers who arose among the Christ-worshipping Nephites around 50 BC. They formed a secret oath-bound society, which eventually became so powerful that it challenged the legitimate government.

To prevent detection and annihilation, Gadianton, the leader of the band, removed his followers from the Nephite capital city and fled "into the wilderness" (Helaman 2:11) Tempted by power and riches, other Nephite dissenters joined this band almost daily. From their hiding places, the robbers infiltrated Nephite cities to "commit murder and plunder." They then retreated "back into the mountains, and into the wilderness and secret places, hiding themselves that they could not be discovered" (Helaman 11:25).

As the robbers increased in strength, they threatened the very existence of the Nephites and the righteous Lamanites. As a result, by about AD 18 the God-fearing Nephites abandoned their lands and gathered at the Nephite capital city to withstand the Gadianton siege. The robbers promptly "began to come down and to sally forth from the hills, and out of the mountains, and the wilderness, and their strongholds, and their secret places . . . and began to take possession of all the lands which had been deserted by the Nephites, and the cities which had been left desolate" (3 Nephi 4:1) In this case, the Nephites triumphed and eradicated the robbers, but only after three years of warfare.

About three hundred years later, Gadianton robbers reemerged and resumed the conflict. This time their satanic activities brought a curse upon the land: "And these Gadianton robbers . . . did infest the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof began to hide up their treasure in the earth; and they became slippery, because the Lord had

cursed the land, that they could not hold them, nor retain them again" (Mormon 1:18). Ultimately, "this Gadianton did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi" (Helaman 2:13). To nineteenth-century Mormons, then, this group of robbers must have represented most things evil, including murder, theft, secret combinations, cursed land, the dispossession of cities, and even potential annihilation. Nineteenth-century Saints also learned that mountains and wilderness locales served as "strongholds" for such satanic activities—a lesson that the physical environment of Utah Territory no doubt embodied at almost every turn.

It would not be until the Mormons found refuge in the semibarren expanses of the Great Basin that a traceable Gadianton legend process could begin in earnest. Nonetheless, as early as the Mormons' troubled stay in Missouri, Gadianton robbers, as a cultural discourse, began to accrue meaning. Parley P. Pratt, for example, while imprisoned at Richmond, Missouri, during the height of Mormon persecution, described his captors as "'Gadianton robbers' and murderers, who could drive out and murder women and children."[32] After a horrific expulsion from Missouri, Mormons settled on the banks of the Mississippi River at Nauvoo, Illinois. There, for a time, they built a flourishing city, Joseph Smith announced new doctrine, and additional context for Gadianton robber legends emerged.

In an article titled "Evidences in Proof of the Book of Mormon," the Nauvoo newspaper printed excerpts from a book of the same name. The book's writer, Charles Thompson, a Mormon elder, based his "proof" upon comparisons between archaeological findings published in Josiah Priest's *American Antiquities* and Book of Mormon verses describing the topography of the land inhabited by Nephites, Lamanites, and Gadianton robbers. Thompson correlated one particular archaeological site directly with the Gadianton robbers. The site lay in the Allegheny Mountains between the Tennessee and Coos rivers. *American Antiquities* described it as a place of "esteemed fortifications," consisting of a stone wall built on the brow of a tremendous ledge. Nearby, excavators had uncovered five interconnected rooms

32 Pratt, *Autobiography*, 204.

carved from the mountain, reportedly constructed during "some dreadful war." After making a detailed argument, Thompson concluded: "This again, is evidence that the Book of Mormon is true, and that this band of robbers were the constructors of this strong hold and these secret rooms."[33] While Thompson's purpose was to offer physical evidence for Book of Mormon settings, he simultaneously introduced Gadianton robbers to Nauvoo Mormons as former inhabitants of areas within the United States.[34]

However, it was in Utah Territory that the robbers from Mormon

33 "Evidences in Proof of the Book of Mormon," *Times and Seasons* 3 (January 1, 1842): 640–44. The portion of this article concerning Gadianton robbers is an exact quotation of Charles Thompson, *Evidences in Proof of the Book of Mormon, Being a Divinely Inspired Record, Written by the Forefathers of the Natives Whom We Call Indians, (Who Are a Remnant of the Tribe of Joseph,) and Hid Up in the Earth, But Come Forth in Fulfillment of Prophesy for the Gathering of Israel and the Re-establishing of the Kingdom of God Upon the Earth. Together with All the Objections Commonly Urged Against it, Answered and Refuted—To Which is Added a Proclamation and Warning to the Gentiles Who Inhabit America* (Batavia, NY: D. D. Waite, 1841), 101–5. Thompson's source for the five secret rooms comes, almost verbatim, from Josiah Priest, *American Antiquities and Discoveries in the West: Being an Exhibition of the Evidence That an Ancient Population of Partially Civilized Nations Differing Entirely From Those of the Present Indians Peopled America Many Centuries before Its Discovery by Columbus, and Inquiries into Their Origin, with a Copious Description of Many of Their Stupendous Works, Now in Ruins, with Conjectures Concerning What May Have Become of Them. Compiled From Travels, Authentic Sources, and the Researches of Antiquarian Societies*, 4th ed. (Albany, NY: Hoffman & White, 1834), 169–70. Priest, however, offers a very different conclusion from Thompson's about the occupants of the five ancient rooms: "The reader can indulge his own conjectures, whether, in the construction of this inaccessible fortress, he does not perceive the remnant of a tribe or nation, acquainted with the arts of excavation and defense; making a last struggle against the invasion of an overwhelming foe; where, it is likely, they were reduced by famine, and perished amid the yells of their enemies" (170).

34 This would not have been the first time that some of the early Saints were introduced to the idea of North America as a possible setting for Book of Mormon happenings. During the march of Zion's Camp, some members of the camp unearthed a human skeleton from a large mound in Illinois that Joseph Smith, through revelation, identified as a "white" Lamanite named Zelph. Kenneth W. Godfrey, "The Zelph Story [1834]," *BYU Studies* 29 (Spring 1989): 31–56. Both Heber C. Kimball and Brigham Young participated in Zion's Camp, and Kimball published a version of the Zelph story in the *Times and Seasons* in 1845 (Godfrey, 38). The Zelph incident perhaps influenced both Kimball and Young in their views that Gadianton robber hideouts had existed in Utah Territory.

scripture took on their greatest significance. While touring southern settlements in 1851, Brigham Young commented to Saints at Parowan that the local Paiute Indians were "descendants of the old Gadianton Robers [*sic*] who infested these Mountains for more than a thousand years."[35] Two years later, on April 6, 1853, presiding bishop Edward Hunter stood atop the newly positioned southwest cornerstone of the Salt Lake Temple and demanded: "Do you remember the history of the Gadiantons as told in the Book of Mormon? We are surrounded by their descendants; those loathsome, effeminate specimens of humanity, which we daily see in our midst, are their children; low, degraded, sunken to the lowest depths of human existence. We have our location amid their strong holds; where the ruins of their cities, towns, and fortifications are yet to be seen; they continue unto this day."[36]

This concept was also understood at a local level. A resident of Harmony, in Washington County, informed the congregation that "these Indians in these mountains are the descendants of the Gadianton robbers, and . . . the curse of God is upon them, and we had better let them alone."[37]

As time progressed, the robber motif accrued meaning beyond reference to local Native Americans. In 1860, Heber C. Kimball declared from the Old Tabernacle: "We read in the Book of Mormon that the Gadianton robbers came down from the mountains—they robbed, plundered, and in many instances slew the Saints. I can tell you, brethren and sisters, that we have similar characters in these mountains, who are making pretty rapid progress in preparing to destroy this people. This I know to my sorrow."[38] The following year from the same pulpit,

35 Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1833–1898, typescript, ed. Scott G. Kenney, (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983–85), 4:26; *Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, (chronology of typed entries and newspaper clippings, 1830–present), May 16, 1851, 1, LDS Church Archives.

36 *Journal History,* April 6, 1853, 3.

37 Ibid., December 18, 1858, 3. See also ibid., July 30, 1853, 2, and December 21, 1854, 5; Robert S. McPherson, "Of Papers and Perception: Utes and Navajos in Journalistic Media, 1900–1930," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 67 (Summer 1999): 201; and John Alton Peterson, *Utah's Black Hawk War* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998), 172.

38 December 16, 1860, *Journal of Discourses*, 8:258.

Young pronounced, "There are scores of evil spirits here—spirits of the old Gadianton robbers, some of whom inhabited these mountains, and used to go into the South and afflict the Nephites. There are millions of those spirits in the mountains, and they are ready to make us covetous, if they can; they are ready to lead astray every man and woman that wishes to be a Latter-day Saint."[39]

In 1865, Kimball touched on the same theme at Centerville, Utah: "There are thousands of evil spirits that are just as ugly as evil can make them. The wicked die, and their spirits remain not far from where their tabernacles are . . . The atmosphere of many parts of these mountains is doubtless the abode of the spirits of Gadianton robbers, whose spirits are as wicked as hell, and who would kill Jesus Christ and every Apostle and righteous person that ever lived if they had the power."[40] About fifteen years later in 1881, John Taylor, Brigham Young's successor, officially connected the robbers to southern Utah. "If we had not possessed these narrow valleys and defiles," he announced in the St. George Tabernacle, "they would have been in the possession of bands of Gadianton robbers, who would have preyed upon the people and their property."[41]

Clearly, then, there was a doctrinal basis for Gadianton legends spreading throughout Utah. Church leaders in official pronouncements from Temple Square and other religious locales created a Gadianton persona that was "as ugly as evil" and "as wicked as hell," and whose sinister purpose it was to prey upon the Saints, make them covetous, lead them astray, and ultimately destroy them. The numbers were daunting: scores, thousands, even millions. Against such odds the Saints must have felt outnumbered and overwhelmed. Robber doctrine likely caused apprehension among some Mormon settlers but also seems to have offered a valid explanation for abandoning a too-difficult site.

39 January 20, 1861, *Journal of Discourses*, 8:344.

40 February 19, 1865, *Journal of Discourses*, 11:84.

41 November 9, 1881, *Journal of Discourses*, 23:17. Taylor's description sounds more like a veiled reference to Paiute Indians, but his intent would become irrelevant at the point where his words passed into oral circulation and began the legend process.

Gadianton robbers grew into a cultural discourse among Mormons. In it, the robbers represented Satan, or at least were on his side. The folk legends about the robbers also cast them as otherworldly opponents to Mormon kingdom building. One version, collected in 1945, not only describes this role but also attributes supernatural powers to the vile horde:

> The Gadianton robbers were evil spirits of Satan who tried to prevent the establishing of the Mormon church. In an early community, tools would disappear, women would set their bread out to raise and it would be turned upside down. If they turned their backs while they were ironing, their irons would disappear. The sawmill would start running at night and would cease if the men came out. These episodes went on for several months and then stopped as quickly as they had started. They were all blamed on the Gadianton robbers.[42]

In general, the robbers became scapegoats for unexplainable events, but at Hebron and other locales they served a purpose beyond that. That 1945 version is the only incident out of thirty-nine robber stories studied here that is not place-specific.[43] All others mention particular locations as robber haunts. An overwhelming majority, 77 percent, place the robbers in southern Utah; and of those, 90 percent specify locations near St. George. This sampling is by no means scientific, but informants from as far away as Ashton, Idaho, linked the robbers to the southwestern corner of the Beehive State.[44] It seems plausible that the legends followed Mormon settlement southward and came to rest in the trying Cotton Mission, of which St. George was the capital.

Young personally guided settlement within the Great Basin, often issuing "calls" to faithful Saints to relocate their families to extend

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42 Wayland D. Hand and Jeannine E. Talley, eds., *Popular Beliefs and Superstitions from Utah: Collected by Anthon S. Cannon* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1984), 323, no. 10269.

43 I researched thirty-nine folk narratives with a Gadianton robber theme from which I draw the generalizations presented here. The vast majority of these are located at the William A. Wilson Folklore Archives at the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University.

44 Suzanne Lyon, story no. 1.1.4.4.1., 1969, "Gadianton Robbers," Wilson Folklore Archives, Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

the frontiers of Zion. Mormon belief that Young acted as God's spokesman added weight to these calls, and those who answered often did so with a conviction that they were under divine obligation. In 1861, Young sent over three hundred families to establish the Cotton Mission in southern Utah, as part of his overall effort to achieve economic self-sufficiency. Young hoped cotton missionaries would produce enough cotton and other warm-climate crops to allow the Saints to stop depending on eastern suppliers.

Yet southern Utah's harsh desert environment, including the unruly Virgin River, proved too difficult a challenge for some. Many gave up and moved elsewhere. Turnover rates among several Cotton Mission settlements ran as high as 70 percent in a ten-year period and, by the turn of the century, averaged around 50 percent, the highest of any area in Utah.[45]

Official admonition to endure the hardships of southern Utah's scorching environment added anxiety to an already burdensome mission. Hebronite Orson Welcome Huntsman, for example, after attending a church conference in St. George in 1879, recorded feeling "quite troubled" over the instruction given to the Saints "to stay where they were already located, not move off, not move to and fro, not go before they were called by proper authority." For Huntsman, this advice "struck hard" because he had just sold his property at Hebron and was in the midst of preparing to find "some place where I could make a comfortable home."[46] The physical uncertainties of the Cotton Mission were

45 W. Paul Reeve, "'A Little Oasis in the Desert': Community Building in Hurricane, Utah, 1860–1930," (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1994), 27–29; Dean L. May, Lee L. Bean, and Mark H. Skolnick, "The Stability Ratio: An Index of Community Cohesiveness in Nineteenth-Century Mormon Towns," in *Generations and Change: Genealogical Perspectives in Social History*, ed. Robert M. Taylor Jr. and Ralph J. Crandall (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 155.

46 Orson Welcome Huntsman, "Diary," typescript, 127, Perry Special Collections. A similar and more forceful example of the type of injunction that accompanied calls to colonize is recorded by Wilford Woodruff in 1851: Brigham Young rebuked thirty of the one hundred men then struggling to establish an Iron Mission near Parowan fort. After three months, they had had enough. Fifteen asked to bring their families to the settlement, while fifteen others wanted to return to Salt Lake City and stay there. As Wilford Woodruff (4:24) recorded

intensified by the settlers' strong sense of duty and the explicit connection between success and piety. Together, this dynamic created an atmosphere ripe for the legend process.

A familiar theme in Gadianton folk legends connects the presence of the heinous robbers to unsuccessful settlement at particular locations. In northern Utah, the robbers reportedly lived in the mouth of Weber Canyon, "so now it is cursed and that is why nothing grows there."[47] Similarly, in a legend about Spanish Fork Canyon, the settlers "complain[ed] of certain weird happenings," such as missing persons and death. The perplexed colonizers consulted Brigham Young, who explained that the canyon was "one of the major hideouts for the Gadianton Robbers." As a result, the people "began building their homes further west."[48] At Harrisburg, a ghost town about ten miles east of St. George, the legend claims that "nothing would grow" there. Brigham Young advised the saints "to move out," explaining that "this is the last stronghold of the Gadianton Robbers" and that the "area has been cursed."[49]

Similar dispossession versions are linked to sawmills in the Cottonwood canyons and Millcreek Canyon near Salt Lake City and the Pine Valley Mountains in southern Utah. Some mill legends include credibility-building details such as the sawmill owner's name

it, Young responded: "If you were now on a mission to France England or any other part of the Earth preaching the gospel you would not sit down & council together about going to get your families or go home untill your mission was ended. This is of quite as much importance as preaching the gospel for the time has now Come when it is required of us to make the wilderness blossom as the rose. Our mission now is build up stakes of Zion & fill these mountains with cities & when your mission is Ended you are at Liberty to go & be free & ownly do right. When I go on A mission I leave my affairs in the Hands of God. If my House, fields, flocks, wife or children die in my absence I say Amen to it. If they live & prosper I feel to say Amen to it & thank the Lord."

47 J. Alice Mueller, "Old Graves, Gold Plates, and Gadianton Robbers: A Study on the Lore of Nephites in Utah," 1977, story no. D-2, "Gadianton Robbers," typescript, Wilson Folklore Archives, Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

48 Erin Sloan, as recorded by Michael Ringwood, legend no. 1.1.4.4.6.1, 1980, "Gadianton Robbers," Wilson Folklore Archives, Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

49 Mueller, story no. F-14, "Harrisburg and the Gadianton Robbers," Wilson Folklore Archives, Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

and the intervention of a higher authority, usually Brigham Young. In general, a sawmill is plagued by strange occurrences, such as the disappearance of tools and the mill starting up at night. Finally, an exasperated owner appeals to Young for help, who then investigates and advises the luckless owner that he has built his mill on ancient Gadianton robber territory. The owner promptly moves his mill and the troubles cease.[50]

Clearly, these narratives carry an underlying assumption that former Gadianton robber territory is uninhabitable. If the Saints were unfortunate enough to settle on old robber land, the solution was to move. In only one version of the sawmill legend do the Saints triumph over the robbers: Young "dispatched some of the general authorities to go to the mill and rebuke the evil spirits in the name of the Lord and commanded them to cease operations and to depart. This was done and no more trouble was encountered."[51] In other versions, the fact that the Mormons had to leave to solve the difficulty suggests that the robbers of legend, like those of Mormon scripture, represented a powerful force that was better left alone, even if it meant abandoning a particular spot to do so.[52]

Given Hebron residents' troublesome colonizing attempt, it seems natural that a Gadianton robber legend took root there. Hebron, in

50 James H. Gardner, "Incidents in Early Utah History: Some May Call it Folklore," in *Heart Throbs of the West*, ed. Kate B. Carter (Salt Lake City: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1939–51), 5:185–86; Andrew Karl Larson, "Ithamar Sprague and His Big Shoes," in *Lore of Faith and Folly*, ed. Thomas E. Cheney (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1971), 31–35.

51 Mildred Malmstrom, as recorded by Lisa Malmstrom, story no. 1.1.4.4.5.1, 1981, "Ghost Story," Wilson Folklore Archives, Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

52 One interesting twist to this theme is a version that must have developed after the turn of the century and the Mormon abandonment of polygamy. It concerns the large polygamous settlement of Short Creek (now Colorado City) that straddles the Utah–Arizona border, founded by dissidents who continue to practice polygamy. According to this version, Indians and Brigham Young both shunned the site because it was Gadianton robber territory, but the polygamists thrived because they are in harmony with these ancient evil spirits. As the teller put it: "They picked up where the Gadianton Robbers left off." See Mueller, story no. F-1, "Why Polygamous Groups So Bad," Wilson Folklore Archives, Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

fact, offers an ideal case study in legend making among nineteenth-century Mormons. Hebron's remote location, over forty-five miles northwest of St. George, made it difficult for all residents to journey to church conferences, either in southern Utah or Salt Lake City. In an effort to not miss important instruction from Young and other leaders, at least one member of the Hebron Ward generally attended conferences and then returned the following Sunday to rehearse the proceedings to the entire congregation. An entry in the ward record describes the usual pattern: "The St. Geo Conference was held on the first sat & sund of Nov [1876] . . . Some of our folks, Bro. Terry, J. W. Hunt, Bro Jones etc. were present and reported the doings to us in our meeting."[53] Hebronites also received oral reports from Salt Lake City, as in October 1868, when "J. W. Hunt gave an account of the Salt Lake Conference from which he has just returned."[54] In recounting a whole conference worth of talks, the reporters became information filters, repeating only the items that most impressed them. Folk legends by nature are anonymous; nevertheless, a returning conference attendee seems a likely candidate in linking pronouncements from the pulpit to the troubles tormenting Hebron, thereby bringing the robbers home to roost. Once Gadianton doctrine passed into oral circulation, the legend process would shape and form a story suitable to Hebron's circumstances.

By the 1890s, the Hebron congregation was certainly ripe for that process. Demonic possessions and bouts with a deadly scourge had already plagued residents, creating an underlying anxiety over town disunity, which seemed to be the true illness afflicting Hebron.

During Utah's Black Hawk War in August 1866, Cotton Mission leaders ordered settlers from Clover Valley, about thirty miles southwest of Hebron, to abandon their village and join the Pulsiphers and others at a fort along Shoal Creek for mutual protection. Simultaneously, a virulent illness of some sort ran rampant among Clover Valley children. John Pulsipher, the ward clerk, noted that "the Clover people have lost nearly all their small children. The Devil was determined to

53 Hebron Ward Record, 3:87–88.

54 Hebron Ward Historical Record, 1867–1872, 2:41, 78, microfilm, LDS Church Archives; and Hebron Ward Record, 3:81.

kill the babies and when it had passed through that place, the scourge commenced here." According to Pulsipher, the youngest daughter of a Brother Callaway fell ill and only "got worse" after being doctored and administered to. Soon the elders gathered to take action. Zera Pulsipher, the group's ecclesiastical head, gave instructions that echoed his Kirtland experience: "We must exercise more than common faith to stop the destroyer—we must humble ourselves before God and covenant to keep all his commandments." The Hebron men united their faith in making such a covenant, and, as John Pulsipher recounted it, "the child was restored to health."[55]

The town responded in similar fashion the following fall and winter when evil spirits possessed Orson Welcome Huntsman and the other town youth described in the introduction. John Pulsipher recounted Huntsman's exorcism: "We have had to unite in the strongest manner to get power over them [the demons]. Have prayed, anointed with oil and administered one after another, sometimes for several hours with all the faith and power we could command before the young man could be relieved."[56]

If the problem was demonic possession, then the solution was unity "in the strongest manner." These sicknesses offered opportunities for the residents to unite and to cast out not only devils but also the perplexing degree of strife that disrupted their community-building efforts. The town failed miserably in its United Order attempt in 1874. Family feuds erupted on occasion, such as when William Pulsipher struck Jefferson Hunt with a rock in 1879, causing "a gash one-and-a-half inches long on his head, besides some bruises."[57] The Huntsmans and Callaways had disputes, as did the Laubs and Barnums. Power conflicts also caused contention: St. George authorities stripped Zera Pulsipher of his influence as presiding elder after he tangled with the school board; Bishop George Crosby moved away after being "burned out" by "an outlaw"; and Bishop Thomas S. Terry resigned after ward "busy bodies" began to

55 Hebron Ward Historical Record, 1862–1867, 1:83–85.

56 Hebron Ward Record, 2:13–14.

57 Huntsman, Diary, 122.

"complain and ask for another Bishop." When Terry's replacement, George A. Holt, selected his counselors, one refused to serve, and the congregation voted not to sustain the other. In 1893, Zera P. Terry summarized the problem: God allowed "self willed men to direct [the town] and the people have had to suffer. Our place and people have become the subject of the scoffs and jeers of their outside brethren & sisters." Battles over land, death by neglect, and the enticements of non-Mormon mining towns also exposed rifts.[58]

In the spring of 1868, John Pulsipher lamented the "stubbornness" and "stiff will" that characterized a "few" townsmen as they quarreled over land and community improvements. Pulsipher prophetically warned the settlers: "Without union we can't do business acceptable to the Lord and unless we are united the Devil will have power over us, we will be broken up and have to leave our homes."[59] In Pulsipher's mind, settling Hebron was cast as a literal battle between the forces of good and evil. The demonic possession of some residents was merely symptomatic of the deeper malady tormenting the town. If the settlers would unite, they could bring God's might to bear in their behalf; otherwise, the devil and his minions would triumph, an outcome Pulsipher believed would bring about the disintegration and abandonment of the town.

Hebron, then, had a long history of turmoil from which a Gadianton legend might emerge. It is easy to envision Hebronites hearing Gadianton stories from the pulpit or as tales already in circulation among the Mormon folk and suddenly recognizing in them the answer to their perplexing failure at community building. Young, Kimball, and other church leaders created an "ugly as evil" Gadianton persona that Hebron residents could readily link to the devils that possessed town youth.

It is interesting to note, however, that the legend applied to Hebron, not to the people. Normand D. Laub, a descendent of Hebron residents, remembered hearing Gadianton stories as a youth: "Supposedly someone had predicted that this had been one of the

58 Reeve, "Cattle, Cotton, and Conflict"; Hebron Ward Record, 3:227–28, 229.

59 Hebron Ward Record, 2:18–19.

areas that the Gadianton robbers had operated out of, back in their days. This would have been some of their territory, and that was why it was plagued with evil spirits." According to legend, then, the ground, the townsite, and the surrounding territory were possessed, but not the town youth. It was not individuals who were demonized, but the town as a whole, thereby leaving Hebronites with no option but to collectively cast themselves out. Laub heard these stories as a child; but as he recalled, "you don't hear them anymore."[60] For Hebron, the tension and anxiety of abandonment is long gone and with it the purpose for repeating Gadianton narratives.

Cases of demonic possession among nineteenth-century Mormons were not unique to Hebron—or even to Mormons. The devil and his cohorts have had a long history of warfare against Christian believers. Mormonism grew out of that context and, through new scripture and doctrinal pronouncement, added its own twist to evil-spirit narratives. Mormon scripture tells of a ferocious and greedy band of robbers that annihilated God's people in the Americas. For nineteenth-century Mormons, those robbers grew to embody a cultural discourse saturated with intense meaning. Mormon leaders cautioned Utah congregations that local Indians were descendants of the ancient robbers. They further warned that the spirits of the original robbers still haunted the territory, intent upon leading astray or killing "every Apostle and righteous person that ever lived."[61] Clearly, folk legends that developed at Hebron about Gadianton robbers emerged from a well-developed tradition filled with demons, exorcisms, and prophetic warnings against millions of vile spirits haunting Zion. Southern Utah's unyielding physical environment must have lent credibility to the legends, conjuring up images of robber strongholds like those described in the Book of Mormon.

Hebronites, therefore, might have reasoned that the forces of evil arrayed against them were simply too powerful. Mormon scripture, and possibly other legends already in circulation, suggested abandonment as the best solution available to luckless inhabitants of cursed

60 Normand D. Laub, interview by Reeve at Beryl, Utah, October 31, 1998; transcript and audiocassette in Reeve's possession.

61 February 19, 1865, *Journal of Discourses*, 11:84.

Gadianton lands. An earthquake in 1902, floods, a cold climate, and a lack of water best explain Hebron's demise. But in coping with that demise, I believe the powerfully destructive robbers offered Hebronites an anxiety-relieving solution to a community-building disappointment. The town's demonic possessions were merely surface manifestations of a broader community illness. When residents failed to eradicate disunity from among themselves, they turned to Mormonism's short history and found ample context to justify Hebron as a Gadianton hideout. In "warring the Christian warfare," as Joseph Smith put it, Hebronites fought a good fight; but as in Mormon scripture, the robbers eventually prevailed. It was a minor victory for evil in a much broader war that raged on.

4

Raising the Dead

Mormons, Evangelicals, and Miracles in America[1]

Matthew Bowman

The power to raise the dead was among the gifts Christ gave his twelve apostles. The Gospel of Matthew records that he "commanded them, saying, Go . . . and as ye go, preach, saying 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils; freely ye have received, freely give.'" Later, Paul asserted that these promises of miracles were not mere rhetoric. However, neither were they to be marveled at, for Paul scoffed at Agrippa's doubt, asking "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?"[2]

It should be no surprise, then, that those religious movements that preached a renewal of the spirit of primitive Christianity in the early years of the American republic claimed also the spiritual gifts that the Bible described. Indeed, these verses indicate two ways that American Christians understood the Biblical heritage of miracles. The tradition represented here by Christ identified the miraculous with the evangelical pulpit, with the force and emotion of Spirit-filled preaching and confidence bred of millennialism and imminent divine intervention. These were the miracles of the charismatic Methodist

1 A version of this essay was previously published in *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 27 (2007): 75–97, and is reprinted here by permission.

2 Matthew 10:5, 7, 8; Acts 26:8 (King James Version).

tradition, of the rough-hewn lay preachers of the burned-over district and the Second Great Awakening. On the other hand, the tradition I identify with Paul deemed resurrection neither miraculous nor out of place in the natural world, but simply a sign of God's authority over his rationally created natural universe. This was the Christianity of the Enlightenment and of the Puritan scholastics, a Christianity confident that miracles were a sign of careful divine design of the universe rather than of unpredictable divine intervention into it. As multiple reports of the dead raised[3] followed across the nation in the wake of the charismatic fires lit by America's Great Awakenings, Americans strove to reconcile these positions; to bring the undisciplined fervor and inspiration of evangelical religion into harmony with the natural theology that the Enlightenment had brought. The theological development of Mormonism—the most enduring and successful of the Second Great Awakening's religious progeny—reveals these tensions in small scale; the Mormons' discussions of, attempts at, and successes in raising the dead reveal both impulses at war in their thought. The absolutist confidence in supernatural intervention bred of their early evangelicalism became increasingly intertwined with theological rationalism and the growing church's own institutional development. Like other American Christians, they sought both miracle and an understandable cosmos, and struggled ultimately toward a new conception of raising the dead.

For a multitude of reasons, the possibility of miracles was of immense importance to American Christians of the early nineteenth century. Camps as theologically distant as rationalist Unitarians and charismatic evangelicals agreed that God indeed could and did raise the dead to indicate his favor or to affirm the divinity of Christ's person and message. The basic supernaturalism of such an event—by which I mean that it occurred through divine intervention that altered or bypassed the natural processes of the universe—had remained unquestioned since John Calvin had enunciated his theory of miracles in the sixteenth century. For Calvin, miracles represented a clear departure from "the natural order of events"; they were thus intended to serve

3 Throughout this paper, I use the terms *resuscitations, revivals*, or simply *raisings of the dead* to describe the miracle in question; the term *resurrection* is reserved for the permanent transformation of the body associated with the eschaton.

only as accreditations of the supernatural divinity of Christ's mission and authority. As the Reformers pursued no new gospel, new miracles were not required. Those who demanded miracles, then, revealed themselves to be "vain and false." In this argument, Calvin made two critical distinctions—the first between the "natural" and the miraculous, the second between true miracle, whose age had passed, and false trickery. This was to remain theoretical Protestant orthodoxy for almost two hundred years, until Enlightenment figures such as John Locke began attempts to reconcile the miraculous claims of Christianity, however historic, with reason. In practice, however, lay Christians both before and after Calvin sought to explain and summon miracles and worked out their own understandings of the ways the supernatural intervened in their everyday lives.[4]

For example, Calvin's second distinction came under stress even in his own lifetime, when his contemporary Martin Luther was reputed to have raised his lieutenant Philip Melanchton from his deathbed. And only a hundred years after Calvin himself lived, Calvinists like the New England Puritans lived in an enchanted world where "omens" and divine signs flourished—a belief structure that was later given a boost by eighteenth-century evangelicals who followed their tradition's stress on spiritual experience toward the seemingly logical conclusion of confidence in a God active in the world. By the nineteenth century, the veracity of modern miracles was paramount to the faith of American evangelicals. The thought of John Wesley, whose Methodist followers were of immense importance in the shaping of antebellum American religion, embodied the nature of this shift. In 1749,

4 John Calvin, "Preferatory Address to His Most Christian Majesty, the Most Mighty and Illustrious Monarch, Francis, King of the French," *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Clark, 1895) 1:16. Calvin echoed Thomas Aquinas on the point: "Those things are properly called miracles which are done by divine agency beyond the order commonly observed in nature." *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III. Aquinas himself drew the principle from Aristotle. On Locke, see John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (London: printed for Awnsham and John Churchil, 1695). On the miraculous world of folk Protestant Christianity, see Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990) and David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

Wesley published an eighty-page refutation of Conyers Middleton, a Cambridge divine who argued, following Calvin, that the age of miracles had passed. Wesley accepted part of Middleton's premise, acknowledging that Middleton was correct to claim that miracles were "interpositions" in the "natural" flow of history and emerged entirely from the realm of the supernatural.[5]

However, Wesley also maintained that miracles were nonetheless signs of "genuine" religion, by which he meant an evangelical Christianity that emphasized charismatic experience and the Holy Spirit. Thus, miracles were accessible in any age of history, for they were dependent upon the eternal promises of God, not on the changeable nature of human society. Thus Calvin was wrong to restrict them to only one period of history; though they were supernatural "interpositions," they signified God's favor and the presence of faithful Christians, who were presumably present in every age. All this he located in the evangelical movement that he helped to found, and indeed historian John Wigger has noted that the earliest Methodists in America lived in a world characterized by miraculous signs, which they understood as indications of God's favor for their faith. Wesley's confidence derived in part from his Arminian theology, which convinced him that, contra Calvin, humanity possessed some ability to influence the course of God's works. In early nineteenth-century evangelical America, this confidence in human faith and effort dealt a death blow to the spiritual quietism of Calvinism. Thus, by the Second Great Awakening, Calvin's insistence that the age of miracles had passed had lost force for many Americans. However, his first dictum remained initially unquestioned; though American evangelicals were convinced both by the pervasiveness of Arminian theology and by their own long-standing belief in folk magic that miracles were possible, they continued to understand such events as essentially supernatural; God was persuaded by faith to intervene in the natural order.[6]

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5 See Ted Campbell, "John Wesley and Conyers Middleton on Divine Intervention in History," *Church History* 55 (Spring 1986): 41, 47.

6 Robert Bruce Mullin, *Miracles and the Modern Religious Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 2–16; John Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 181–89.

Elijah Pierson, for example, was an archetypal evangelical, a close associate of Lyman Beecher, Presbyterian revivalist and dean of the reformers of the Second Great Awakening. Pierson and his wife, Sarah, had both been born of the Spirit; their marriage, historians Paul Johnson and Sean Wilentz have said, was "a spiritualized union . . . it thrived on prayer."[7] Both maintained a personal relationship with Christ. On June 29, 1830, Sarah died. Elijah, stricken, leaned upon the evangelical assurance of salvation he had received; for he believed as Wesley had taught, that the vital connection that conversion created between believers and God made miracles possible. Citing the Epistle of James, he cried to God that "the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up." And indeed Christ appeared to Elijah and told him not only that if Elijah pursued the evangelical work he and Sarah had started, God would return Sarah to him, but also that Elijah himself "shall ascend up to me, and not pass through the grave." Elijah therefore embraced charismatic prophecy with renewed fervor; he became "Elijah the Prophet," wandering America, teaching and preaching.[8] The intensity of his religious life, he believed, made not only such reversals of natural death possible, but also healing the sick and casting out devils, powers that Elijah claimed had been granted to him. Alas, Elijah's wife never revived, and he himself sank into madness.

A more successful resuscitation was that of Jemima Wilkinson. In 1768, Wilkinson, a young Quaker, discovered the charismatic preaching of George Whitefield. She renounced her own faith and embraced the Anglican's ecumenical evangelicalism. Eight years later, after a bout with a fever, she died. What happened next Jemima recounted in language allusive to the Crucifixion of Christ, indeed even paraphrasing the Bible. As she told it, after she "yielded up the Ghost . . . the Spirit took full possession of the Body."[9] This language is doubly important because of Jemima's own evangelicalism; for her,

7 Sean Wilentz and Paul Johnson, *The Kingdom of Matthias* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 27.

8 Wilentz and Johnson, *Kingdom*, 38.

9 Herbert A. Wisbey, *Pioneer Prophetess: Jemima Wilkinson, the Publick Universal Friend* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964), 12–13.

as for all evangelicals who believed in substitutionary atonement, the Crucifixion was a moment of profound human identification with Christ and his miraculous conquest of the grave. Her discussion of the Spirit referenced the supernatural surrender that believers made upon conversion; converted evangelicals were to live according to the supernatural direction of God, driven no longer by their own natural impulses, but by the promptings of the Spirit. After a vision of Christ in heaven, Jemima awoke. Like Lazarus and Christ himself, she had undergone death and revival, but the degree to which evangelicals understood the deep connection between their own variety of religion and the nature of miracles is revealed in Jemima's understanding of her experience. Unlike the risen Lazarus, who was reborn into the life he had left, and whose revival seemed merely a demonstration of Christ's own authority over the grave, for Jemima the process of revival, like the evangelical conversion, was a literal "rebirth." She was no longer the old Jemima Wilkinson; rather, she was now to be referred to by the title God had given her: the "Publick Universal Friend," raised from her deathbed to evangelize the world, and gifted with a unique spiritual connection to God. Further, the Friend claimed her new role gave her the power of "Healing of People." Her profound closeness to God was manifested in the gift of authority over the deleterious effects of the natural world, to be wielded in the behalf of true believers; as her follower Abner Brownell wrote, "She would tell them if they had faith to believe, why she could do it."[10]

For both Wilkinson and Pierson, the gift of revival was charismatic and informal, the result of an intimate relationship with God, and a miracle that occurred within the context of a charismatic experience—Jemima's visit to heaven, Elijah's visions—interpreted within a Spirit-infused world generated by the evangelical conversion. Further, the miracle was understood as essentially supernatural, a divine intervention into the natural world that reversed the normal course of things for God's own purposes. On this, Calvin was still unquestioned. However, both Pierson and Wilkinson followed Wesley rather than Calvin in that they understood their experiences as a validation

10 Ibid., 49.

of the vitality of charismatic Christianity, a natural byproduct of a relationship with God, rather than a special dispensation to signal Christ's divinity. Horace Bushnell, a leading Congregational pastor, summarized this view in his book *Nature and the Supernatural*. Bushnell argued that frequent and common miracles were essential to demonstrate the truth of a God who both controlled and transcended the natural order, and intervened therein to "lift the church out of the abysses of mere second-hand religion," a term Bushnell used to describe the emptiness of worship without the constant inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Further, witnessing miracles endowed believers with the "moral character" of true religion, a sign that they held a living faith and were thus part of the otherworldly Kingdom of God.[11] Though the Bible scorned sign seekers, it promised these gifts to them that believed, and, as Bushnell did, many antebellum evangelicals associated the gift of raising the dead with spiritual connection to a God that transcended the natural order.

Much early Mormon discourse on raising the dead echoes this evangelical understanding. Just as Jemima and Elijah believed that their own encounters with God restored to the earth the spiritual connection with God required for miracle, so were early Mormons convinced that their own restoration of God's work did the same. As the Bible described Christ's apostles endowed with the gift, so did the Book of Mormon describe figures such as Nephi raising his brother from the dead, and the gift restored by Christ when he visited the Nephite civilization in America shortly after his resurrection.[12] Mormonism was to follow this precedent. Beginning in 1829, Joseph Smith began to ordain his followers with divine authority, granting to them offices and powers echoing those described in the New Testament. However, while the first reported Mormon attempts to raise the dead, beginning in 1831, followed the earliest ordinations chronologically, they also preceded the ordinations of the members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, organized in 1835, that specifically granted the power to perform such a feat. Indeed, the powers

11 Horace Bushnell, *Nature and the Supernatural* (New York: Scribner, 1847), 448.

12 Book of Mormon (LDS), 3 Nephi 7:19; 4 Nephi 1:5.

conferred by ordination to Smith's priesthood were unclear in the early years of church organization, and the power to raise the dead seems to have been associated as much with the evangelical authority of faith and living communion with God as with that of formal ordination.[13]

For example, in April 1832 the Palmyra *Wayne Sentinel* reported that the unnamed companions of a poisoned Mormon missionary, Joseph Brackenbury, "in confirmation of their doctrines and divine mission . . . professed to have power to heal the sick and raise the dead . . . [and] attempted also to heal him, and since his decease, to raise him from the dead." The same newspaper that reported their attempt described them as having "preached, exhorted and with great zeal and apparent humility, attempted to propagate their doctrines."[14] Though they had likely been ordained to some office, these Mormons seem to have followed Wesley in spirit; for them, the Spirit-filled nature of the restoration they were part of meant that it should include such gifts as raising the dead, and this despite the fact that the authority associated with particular priesthood offices remained unclear.

A similar event occurred in Ohio. It was reported several decades later that in the summer of 1832, Orson Pratt, a leading Mormon apologist and eventual apostle, raised the daughter of David Rosenburger from her deathbed. The *Watertown Daily Times* wrote that Pratt,

> after praying beside the corpse and anointing the brow from the strange vase of ointment asked that all leave the room, and a moment later, recalled the weeping friends to show them their daughter, restored to life. Even the adherents to the new faith doubted this miracle, it is said, and there was a falling off in attendance at the Mormon meetings.[15]

Pratt was successful while Brackenbury's companions were not, but, like theirs, his efforts were accomplished before the authority to raise the dead was given—in Pratt's case, to him specifically, in his ordination as

13 See Gregory Prince, *Power from on High* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 6–20.

14 *Wayne Sentinel*, April 11, 1832, cited in *Mormonism Unvailed*, ed. E. D. Howe, (Painesville, OH: author, 1834), 190.

15 *Watertown Daily Times*, December 10, 1898, reprinted in *Jefferson County Genealogy* 12, no. 1 (April 11, 2002): 9.

an apostle in 1835. In the Rosenburger household, however, Pratt began like Elijah Pierson, with simple prayer, and despite the anointment there is no sign of the blessing ritual of the sort Mormons would later deem essential to healing. The fact that it seemed to damage Mormon evangelical work did not daunt early Mormons; indeed, they seemed to jealously defend the spiritual charisma that made them unique. Wilford Woodruff, later the third president of the church, for example, recorded an experience that the apostle David Patten had: "Elder Patten Preached three discourses . . . After the close of the last discours [*sic*] Mr. Rose rejected the testimony given & called on Br Patten to raise the dead that he might believe. Br Patten rebuked him sharply for his infidelity & unbelief. We then communed with the Saints."[16]

Patten's words reveal him to hold a position similar to what Erastus Snow, who would become an apostle in 1849, expressed in the newspaper Smith founded in Nauvoo, Illinois, the *Times and Seasons*: "This is the only rule that is laid down in the scriptures, by which we can judge of the character of sign-seekers. We do not go about on purpose to work miracles to gratify curiosity; but to preach the gospel; neither do we make any pretensions to raise the dead."[17] Such a view reflected that held by John Wesley and Bushnell—that such spiritual gifts were a happy side effect of faith, part of the spiritual vitality that characterized the presence of true religion, and that they should therefore be celebrated for their own sake rather than controlled or wielded. This was a departure from the exclusively historical evidentiary role that Calvin ascribed to miracles; it also differed from later attempts to rationalize and institutionalize them. However, for antebellum Americans to demand or attempt to predict or explain miracles was, as Patten argued, "infidelity and unbelief," echoing Calvin's castigation of sign seekers.

Another attempt at the charismatic revival of a corpse occurred in June 1831, when the Mormon Ezra Booth reported from a conference of church members that a "dead body, which had been retained above ground two or three days, under the expectation that the dead would

16 Woodruff, Wilford, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1833–1898, typescript, ed. Scott Kenney (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1981–1984), 1:70.

17 *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 1 (November 1, 1841): 580.

be raised, was insensible to the voice of those who commanded."[18] Smith's biographer Richard Bushman has described this conference as a Pentecost, permeated with the sort of spiritual experiences and supernatural manifestations that the famed evangelical revival at Cane Ridge in Kentucky thirty years earlier had seen. The Methodist minister Peter Cartwright, present at Cane Ridge, reported that the preachers there "would proclaim that they could heal all manner of diseases and raise the dead"—a claim Cartwright linked to the appearance of other spiritual gifts that appeared at Cane Ridge, particularly speaking in tongues and visions. All these things induced the horrified Cartwright to resurrect the old pejorative "enthusiasm" to describe the indecorous, unnatural manifestations he encountered. Cartwright was more comfortable with an older school of Calvinist revivalism that Jonathan Edwards had encouraged, one preaching self-control and decrying untamed emotion.[19]

The June conference, however, summoned the specter of the Cane Ridge revival rather than that of the rational evangelicalism Edwards believed in. Though Smith ordained several men, promising spiritual gifts, they came in ways unpredictable and uncontrolled. Men were overwhelmed physically by supernatural forces; events occurred similar to those at Cane Ridge such as preaching in tongues and bodily contortions. Indeed, Bushman traces these expectations and results to those Mormons' beginnings in charismatic Methodism. Booth's report of the attempt to raise the child is as consistent with the setting—a Cane Ridge–style revival with its attendant spiritual gifts—as with the authority of priesthood conveyed there, and may owe more to the former than the latter. Indeed, the expectations and descriptions of the event are more consistent with an evangelical revival driven in surprising ways by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit than a scripted and formal "conference" after the manner of Presbyterian synods

18 Prince, *Power from on High*, 159. Ezra Booth letters, cited in Howe, Mormonism Unvailed, 190.

19 Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 146–57; Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright* (Cincinnati: Cranston, 1856), 51–52; Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise on Religious Affections*, ed. John Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959).

that Mormon meetings later resembled. Later Mormon conferences focused primarily upon teaching doctrine and organizing the hierarchy of the church; at the June meeting, however, experiencing the work of the Spirit in charismatic ways was paramount. A similar description of an early Mormon meeting comes from Maria Ward (pseudonym for Elizabeth Cornelia Woodcock Ferris, wife of Utah Territorial Secretary Benjamin G. Ferris). She reported that she had seen the prophet raise a child from the dead in a dramatic late-night service in the early 1830s. Smith there preached of the "miraculous" and led a "wild and tumultuous" hymn before summoning the girl back to life. The affair was "electric . . . many of the females shrieked, others sobbed." Ward then summoned that telltale word, "enthusiasm," to describe her "intense, solemn and impressive," experience in Smith's church.[20]

Thus, in both success and failure, early Mormon experiences with raising the dead were shaped by evangelical supernaturalism. The most dramatic indication of this occurred only two years following the June conference, in the early summer of 1834. In May, Joseph led an expedition of Mormon men from his headquarters in Kirtland, Ohio, their mission to aid Mormons facing persecution in Missouri. While en route in late June, this expedition, dubbed Zion's Camp, was stricken with cholera. To Joseph Smith, the horror of the disease revealed the implacability and unpredictability of God's will and power. As he and his fellows reported it, the disease worked as though it had a diabolical malevolence of its own, and it mocked the traditional rituals of healing the Mormons practiced—as Joseph said, "the moment I attempted to rebuke the disease [through laying on of hands] I was attacked, it seized upon me like the talons of a hawk." Similarly, "Elder John S. Carter was the first man who stepped forward to rebuke it, and upon this, was instantly seized, and became the first victim in the camp." Even those who buried Carter, who "united, covenanted, and prayed" for relief at his grave site, were stricken; one Eber Wilcox died while in prayer.[21] Thus were early attempts to capture divine authority within

20 Maria Ward, *Female Life among the Mormons* (New York: Derby, 1855), 20, 21, 22.

21 Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (1902, reprint, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1961), 2:115.

the boundaries of ritual and predictability frustrated. Rather, this was Jemima Wilkinson raised from the dead in reverse; as no doctor attended her, so could none of Joseph's efforts stave off the cholera. As Jemima told her followers, there was nothing that humans could do to dictate the will of God; healing came like a knife plunging through the natural universe at the pleasure of the divine. Similarly, in Zion's Camp there was no resisting the disease; Joseph associated it with the will of God and proclaimed that "when the Great Jehovah decrees destruction . . . man must not attempt to stay his hand."[22]

And yet the next year, Joseph Smith Sr. laid his hands on the head of Brigham Young, ordaining him a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, and promised him "the Holy Priesthood . . . that he may do wonders in the name of Jesus, that he may cast out devils, heal the sick, raise the dead, [and] open the eyes of the blind." The members of the Quorum of the Twelve were thus the first explicitly promised the power to raise the dead. David Patten was charged to be "like one of old, who bore testimony of Jesus," and was granted "the qualifications of the prophets before him . . . power over all diseases, and faith according to his desires."[23] Later, Orson Pratt was charged to "raise the dead, if needful, to accomplish thy mission," and William Law was asked "And what if I will that he should raise the dead, let him not withhold his voice."[24] These ordinations formalized the previously charismatic nature of spiritual gifts. However, there is an interesting note of hesitancy in the final two blessings, a fatalism that echoes Joseph's agony in Zion's Camp and qualifies the seeming formalization of miraculous authority that Young and Patten's blessings imply. Thus, it is important to remember that the charismatic and formal conceptions of the authority to work miracles have existed in tandem and have sometimes worked together in Mormon theology, though just as often they have been in tension.

Historian Melodie Moench Charles has noted that for much of Mormon history, "when someone manifests spiritual gifts or performs

22 Wisbey, *Pioneer Prophetess*, 45–49; Roberts, *History of the Church*, 2:114.

23 Roberts, *History of the Church*, 2:188–90.

24 Patriarchal Blessings Book, typescript, April 21, 1835. LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah; Prince, *Power from on High*, 158–60.

miracles such as healing the sick or raising the dead . . . [they] often invoke the power of God or Christ, or claim that the power of God, Christ, or faith," rather than priesthood authority, makes such a miracle possible, drawing on the old evangelical tradition of faith and charisma.[25] Joseph himself, in a dramatic reversal from the debacle of Zion's Camp, exhibited such charismatic healing powers in July of 1839 in the twin cities of Commerce and Montrose, Illinois, where the Mormons who fled Missouri had gathered. There they were stricken with malaria, and on July 22 Joseph went from house to house raising them from their sickbeds. Though by this point rituals of blessing had been established, and the Twelve had been told that it was through the power of their priesthood that they could raise the dead, in Montrose, Joseph bypassed the formalized rituals that he himself had established, instead relying on faith and divine intervention, as his followers had eight years before. Wilford Woodruff wrote that "we experienced a day of God's power," and noted that on that day "the power of God rested upon [Joseph] mightily," sacralizing the entire event and time after the fashion of Cane Ridge or the June conference. Indeed, in its own way, Montrose was a revival, a pouring out of the Holy Spirit. According to all observers, Joseph healed many simply by commanding it in the name of Christ. Elijah Fordham was at death's door; to heal him, Joseph merely asked about his faith in Christ, just as Jemima had. For Woodruff, Joseph healed "as Jesus healed," and spoke to Fordham "in the voice of God." Fordham, according to all reports, immediately "shook the poultices and bandages" off, indicating that in Commerce, healing required not medicine, but only the power of the Spirit.[26] Parley Pratt even noted that Joseph "while in the Spirit rebuked the Elders who would continue to lay hands upon the sick . . . without the power to heal them."[27] The ritual of laying on of hands was futile, even an offense, in the face of the "power" of pure spiritual charisma. For Joseph in Zion's Camp and

25 Melodie Moench Charles, "LDS Women and Priesthood: Scriptural Precedents for Priesthood," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18 (Fall 1985): 18.

26 Wilford Woodruff, *Leaves from My Journal* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor's Office: 1881), 75–79.

27 Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1874), 355.

in Commerce, the power to heal was a spiritual gift, dependent upon one's relationship with God—be it that of Elijah Fordham or the elders who sought to heal in vain—rather than upon the formalities of ritual, office, or ordination.

Of course, such charismatic expressions of spiritual gifts have never existed in isolation; even at Montrose Joseph's own efforts occurred alongside attempts to wield the formal power of ritual. Faith healing of the sort Joseph engaged in had, since the beginnings of Mormon history, faced tensions from both the inside and out, from both the burgeoning Mormon hierarchy of priesthood—men granted the formal authority to wield spiritual power—as well as from the increasing explanatory power of natural theology that crept into the world of early nineteenth-century American Christianity. Most often, however, these strands of influence were not separated but developed in synergy and tandem as they shaped the theology of Mormon healing away from the evangelical heritage from which it emerged.

One of the earliest of Joseph Smith's revelations exemplified the complex intertwining of these strands. Received in February 1831, it directed the Saints in the manner by which they should seek to heal the sick:

> And the elders of the church, two or more, shall be called, and shall pray for and lay their hands upon [the sick] in my name, and if they die, they shall die unto me, and if they live, they shall live unto me . . . Again, it shall come to pass that he that hath faith in me to be healed, and is not appointed to death, shall be healed."[28]

All three elements of Mormon healing can be seen here. The revelation echoes Joseph Smith and Jemima Wilkinson on faith and the implacable power of divinity; it stresses the formalities of ordained elders and the laying on of hands; and, finally, it curiously does not promise anything. It confesses that death is sometimes inevitable. Like the qualified promises of the ordination of the Twelve, the confidence in divine intervention here is limited. One could imagine the Joseph Smith of Montrose, vibrating with the power of the Holy Spirit,

28 Doctrine and Covenants (LDS), 42:44, 48.

castigating the Joseph Smith of eight years earlier for his fatalism and willingness to acknowledge that even with priesthood blessings the sick may die, or without, might live.

What might explain the strange ambiguity of this revelation? Soon after his healings at Commerce, Joseph enunciated a more complex position on life, death, and miracle than what he had taken in Zion's Camp. The strain of the cholera had led Joseph to ascribe failures of healing to divine will; after Commerce, however, he took a more naturalistic position. In Nauvoo he taught:

> All flesh is subject to suffer . . . the just shall live by faith, yet many of the righteous shall fall prey to disease, to pestilence, etc., by reason of the weakness of the flesh, and yet be saved in the Kingdom of God. So that it is an unhallowed principle to say that such and such have transgressed because they have been preyed upon by disease or death, for all flesh is subject to death.[29]

It followed then that if sickness was not entirely an affliction of God, raising the dead and healing might not be solely the province of the supernatural. Indeed, in the same 1831 revelation, Smith had stressed the healing powers of the natural world, directing that "whosoever among you are sick, and have not faith to be healed, but believe, shall be nourished with all tenderness, with herbs and mild food."[30] Throughout his life, he repeatedly emphasized the importance of natural healing methods, pointing out that "it is better to save the life of a man than raise one from the dead."[31] When Joseph himself fell sick, he described his own healing in this way:

> I continued to grow worse and worse until my sufferings were excruciating, and although in the midst of it all I felt to rejoice in the salvation of Israel's God, yet I found it expedient to call to my assistance those means which a kind Providence had provided for the restoration of the sick, in connection with the ordinances, and Dr. Levi Richards, at my request, administered to

29 As cited in Lester Bush, *Health and Medicine among the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1993), 46.

30 Doctrine and Covenants (LDS), 42:43.

31 Scott M. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 369–70.

> me herbs and mild foods, and nursed me with all tenderness and attention, and my Heavenly Father blessed his administrations.[32]

Joseph here drew upon a strain of Christian thought whose roots in America went as far back as the Puritans, and was rejuvenated in his own lifetime, serving as a counterweight to the charismatic supernaturalism that flourished in the early republic. The Puritans, bound by Calvin's cessationism to believe that no new supernatural miracles were possible, still hungered for and found the hand of God in their daily lives. To reconcile their desires with their theology, they renamed miracles "providence," as Smith did here, and the great divine Cotton Mather defined them as the blessings and goodwill of God woven into the fabric of the natural order of things. If an English ship was saved from sinking by the abrupt cessation of a storm, the Puritans reckoned that God had constructed the weather patterns of the Atlantic to ensure that the winds would cease at the time necessary; or, as Smith understood the nature of his recovery, God had ordained certain herbs to be the means of his own divine healing. This stood in contrast to the supernaturalist miracles of Catholicism, which Mather scorned as "diabolical" sign seeking; rather, among the Puritans God was understood to exert his power via the normal, rational channels of the natural world. This was, of course, in perfect accord with Calvinist orthodoxy; however, it preserved the desires of the faithful to gain divine aid. Importantly, this sacralized nature and rationalized the divine; for if God's miracles grew naturally from the everyday workings of the world, they could be comprehended in and of themselves, and their purposes could also be understood.[33]

Though charismatic movements such as those of Jemima Wilkinson and Ann Lee spurned this competing interpretation of miracles, so also did the deist theologians of the Enlightenment, who rejected the irrationality they believed inherent in any sort of divine

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32 Roberts, *History of the Church*, 2:493.

33 For an example of this theology, see Cotton Mather, *Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences* (Boston, 1684). See also Mullin, *Miracles*, chapter 1; Theodore Bozeman, *The Precisionist Strain* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), and Perry Miller, T*he New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (New York: MacMillan, 1939).

intervention. In response, evangelicals such as Edwards and William Paley sought a new middle way, one drawing on Puritan providence to declare that God's workings in the world pursued a rational and understandable course. Edwards, for example, sought to outline a blueprint for the functioning of God's Holy Spirit, describing the ways that true divine influence could be told through observation and deduction, and he later argued that the hand of God could be found in history, guiding human civilization along an explainable course. Sixty years later, Paley's 1804 *Natural Theology* maintained that the nature humanity perceived and mastered was itself a miracle, and that God worked through the ebb and flow of geological and ecological processes to achieve his purposes.[34]

The Methodists, from whose ranks Mormonism drew so many of its early members, followed this course. Despite the strong supernaturalist bent of the denomination in early America—particularly in the form of the Holiness subsect, which increasingly emphasized the immediacy and supernaturalism of the power of the Holy Spirit—John Wesley had taught that "God has more than one method of healing either the soul or the body." Though he, in the words of one historian, "urged physicians to recognize and accept their limits," he also believed in the authority and abilities of those trained in medicine.[35] A proper appreciation of God's power recognized both. Reflecting both Wesley's own thought and the currents of the age, the antebellum Methodist theologian Thomas Ralston believed in the potentials of immortality and resurrection but also argued that God achieved these things in the human body through something comparable to science, altering and working within the natural courses of veins and nerves rather than sustaining immortality through sheer supernatural power. All of this ultimately placed nature alongside scripture as the great text on which God's plan could be read and made science a new hermeneutic for

34 Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (Boston, 1741); William Paley, Natural Theology (Boston, 1804).

35 Brooks Holifield, *Health and Medicine in the Methodist Tradition* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1986), 8. On the supernaturalism of early evangelicalism, see Paul Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm in the New World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 179.

the divination of his purposes. This was the school of theology that inspired Peter Cartwright's horror at the irrationality of Cane Ridge.[36]

It also dealt a blow to the sort of dramatic miracles that Jemima Wilkinson represented and Elijah Pierson hoped for. The conviction that God's works should fit within the contours of a rational universe demanded of them purpose and order. Peter Cartwright doubted the possibility that supernatural miracles such as raising the dead could provide this. He called the claims of the necromancers of Cane Ridge "extravagancies" that the "weak-minded, ignorant, and superstitious . . . indulged" in due to "sympathetic feeling" and attempts to imitate the effects of the actual Holy Spirit, which worked not through fits and visions but through systematic revelation of knowledge and in pursuit of rational goals. His own conversion experience was a true work of the Spirit, for it taught him of the truth of God; the excesses at Cane Ridge, on the other hand, taught nothing to anybody.[37]

The Unitarians expounded this middle way of the understanding of miracle perhaps the most forcefully. What Daniel Walker Howe has called their "supernatural rationalism" revived Calvin to chart an explanatory path. Andrews Norton, the preeminent defender of miracles in the Unitarian tradition, railed against Transcendentalism's skepticism of supernatural miracles in 1839, maintaining that God was simultaneously rational and personal. While the second attribute demanded the presence of miracles, the first required that the universe be orderly. Thus the Unitarians had no difficulty accepting that, as Calvin had maintained, the age of miracles had ceased. Miracles served to convince the rational mind of the veracity of Christ's claims to divinity, and thus their purpose had been served. For the Unitarians, Christianity was to be a rational religion, designed to develop character and morality; they therefore had little use for the sort of reveling in the gifts of the spirit that occurred at Cane Ridge or Kirtland.

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36 Thomas Ralston, *Elements of Divinity* (Nashville, 1848), 474–91. On the growing division between charismatics and rational "formalists" in early Methodism, see Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 86–98, 148–50.

37 Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 51–52.

Christ's resuscitation of Lazarus was the exception that proved the rule when it came to God's interventions in the universe.[38] Thus William Updike, a skeptic of Jemima Wilkinson, noted drily when the Friend failed in her 1780 attempt to raise the body of Susannah Porter that "the laws of nature were unflexible. The impious effort was unavailing. She imputed the failure to the old excuse, the want of faith in her followers."[39] Jemima appealed to the essentially supernatural cause of faith; Updike was already feeling the rationalist pressures of the Enlightenment and, as Cartwright would twenty years later, named attempts to accomplish the irrational blasphemy.

Indeed, as the nineteenth century progressed, faith healing became ever less supernatural and more materialist—not merely in terms of increased reliance upon science but also in a growing conviction of the fundamental connection between the soul and the body, the sacred and the mundane. Later in the nineteenth century, the psychologist and student of religion James Monroe Buckley concluded that "spiritual" healings of all types were closely connected to science—Mesmerists, "magnetizers," spiritualists, and Christian healers alike all seemed to tap into a similar reservoir of mental and spiritual power. In the 1840s, the spiritualist Andrew Jackson Davis argued that the spirits he contacted through séances were capable of fostering healing, for, as he said, "Matter is the foundation of Mind, Mind is the spiritualization of Matter" and "no distinction exists between humankind's moral and physical selves."[40] These ideas closely paralleled the teachings of Joseph Smith and the Mormon apostle Parley Pratt on the same subject, and the thought of all these men posited a close connection between the workings of the physical and the influences of the spiritual. Thus, though they drew upon the rationalism of

38 Andrews Norton, "A Discourse on the Latest Form of Infidelity," in *The Transcendentalists*, ed. Perry Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), 210–13.

39 Wisbey, *Pioneer Prophetess*, 48.

40 Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 226–29; Ronald Walters, *American Reformers*, 2nd ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 170. For an example of the Transcendentalist position here, see George Ripley, "The Latest Form of Infidelity Examined" in Miller, *Transcendentalists*, 213–20.

the Unitarians, the natural theologians also drew upon the confidence of their Transcendentalist opponents, who claimed that supernatural miracles did not exist, for the natural world was miracle enough.[41]

We have already seen the influence of this rational naturalism side by side with a more charismatic supernaturalism in Joseph Smith's own thought on healing and raising the dead. It transformed the Mormon conception of evangelical healing in two ways. First, as early as 1831, when the revelation that was canonized as section 42 of Smith's Doctrine and Covenants recommended healing herbs alongside priesthood blessings, Joseph Smith's teachings had begun to intertwine the supernatural and the material worlds. This tendency, present in antebellum American Christianity, became particularly explicit in an explicitly literalist and materialist Mormon theology. In addition to Joseph Smith's own definition of spirit as "refined matter," his successor Brigham Young taught that the "spirit world" of the dead was mirrored in sociality and was perhaps even simultaneously present with our own world on Earth.[42] And of course Smith, perhaps most famously, slammed closed the ontological gap between God and humanity when he taught that God himself possessed flesh and bone—elevating the human body to a status of extreme religious significance. This sacralization of the body persisted into the twentieth century; Lester Bush has documented that as late as the 1940s, the *Church Handbook of Instructions* strongly discouraged cremation, and as late as the 1960s, leaders of Mormon temple rituals instructed members against organ donation—both directives in anticipation of a literal resurrection that presumably began its course by working with whatever materials of the body remained.[43]

Thus, the ways in which Mormons understood the raising of the dead seemed to shift with increasing ease between the workings of the natural world and the workings of God, blending and finding no contradiction between the two. As Wilford Woodruff wrote, "Some

41 For Pratt, see Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855), which builds upon Smith's belief that spirit was merely "refined matter."

42 Bush, *Health and Medicine*, 28–32.

43 Bush, *Health and Medicine*, 106.

times we lay hands upon the sick & they are healed instantly. Other times with all the faith & medicine they are a long time getting well, & others die."[44] Not infrequently, for example, stories describe a person raised from the dead only to succumb days or weeks later from the same malady. The most famous example is that of Willard Richards, a counselor in Brigham Young's presidency.

> President Willard Richards departed this life this morning at about 30 minutes past 9 oclock. After President Richards was reduced as it were to deaths door by the laying on of hands & the prayer of faith He was raised up so that he walked about his rooms & appeared as though he was going to get well. But he has taken a relapse & been failing for several days & this morning He appeared wors [sic] & the Twelve were sent for . . . But before we could get there He was dead.[45]

A Mormon folktale describes an almost identical occurrence: a baby boy, child—the story reports—of a pair of nineteenth-century Scandinavian converts to the church, was afflicted by "convulsions" en route to Utah and died. Upon receiving a blessing from his father, the child revived and lived to see Utah, only to succumb to the same disease there. [46] Curiously, the collector of this tale, a descendent of the family involved, recalled the story with fondness, seeing in it a forestalling of an inevitable death, a blessing rather than a mockery in which God both fulfilled the demands of his own providence and sustained the faith of the family. Similarly, Woodruff's recounting of Richards's death reflects a fatalism that the Mormon leader expressed elsewhere, when he recounted an experience he had in Salt Lake City:

> Some are much tried because all are not healed that they lay hands upon but I do not feel so. I had a case during Conference concerning the case of Sister Baris. She was sick & I laid Hands upon her & blessed her with life & health & went to meeting.

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44 Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal,* 3:3255.

45 Susan Staker, ed., *Waiting for World's End: The Journal of Wilford Woodruff* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 161.

46 Folk Collection 8a, Group 7, Box 4, 1.3.6.12.1; Fife Folklore Archives, Utah State University Special Collections, Logan, Utah.

> In an hour I had word that she was dead. It did not try me. The Lord saw fit to take her & all is right.[47]

For Wilford Woodruff, as for so many contemporary American Protestants, the course of nature reflected God's will as much as any divine intervention might. Indeed, Brigham Young summarized the essential nature that both these things shared when he described exactly what he believed raising the dead to be:

> The Lord Almighty could resuscitate a corpse lying before us . . . He has the material on hand, and He knows every process, and He could give life to a lifeless being, with ease, by the elements he would operate upon and with. This is a great miracle in our estimation; but it would be no miracle at all to the Lord, because He knows precisely how to do it. There is no miracle to any being in the heavens or on the earth, only to the ignorant. To a man who understands the philosophy of all the phenomena that transpire, there is no such thing as a miracle. A great many think there are results without causes; there is no such thing in existence; there is a cause for every result that ever was or ever will be, and they are all in the providences and in the work of the Lord.[48]

This was natural theology as pure as that preached by Thomas Ralston or William Paley, made all the more effective by the context of Mormon theology in which it existed. This God works with elements already present; just as Joseph Smith rejected creation ex nihilo, so did Brigham describe a God who heals by working with inherent capabilities of the body that lies afflicted—a far cry from the supernatural, instantaneous healing that prompted Joseph's patients to rip off their poultices at Commerce. Further, this form of healing reflects Mormonism's Arminian tendencies; just as Joseph Smith and the noted Arminian John Wesley revived the importance of human effort in the quest for salvation, so Brigham taught: "If we are sick and ask the Lord to heal us, and to do all for us that is necessary to be done, according to my understanding of the Gospel and salvation, I might as well ask the Lord to cause my wheat and corn to grow without

47 Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journa*l, 4:347.

48 *Journal of Discourses* 13 (1871): 33.

my plowing the ground."[49] It is notable that Brigham connects his understanding of divine healing to his understanding of salvation; in both, he stresses, human understanding plays a role.

A number of folktales reflect the inherent limits of this form of healing. One story, dated to the 1950s, tells of one "Roy Plumb" who fell into a mining shaft and was badly injured, to the point where doctors felt that "if he lived, he would never be able to live a normal life." Roy died three days later, and that night, over his deathbed, his bishop had an extraordinary debate with an angel for Roy's life. The bishop appealed that Roy be allowed to live, asking that "Roy be left upon the earth that he may finish his mission"—a plea that echoes the Calvinist insistence upon meaningful manifestations of the divine. Roy was restored, but "he was handicapped in that he had to wear a girdle for the rest of his life . . . and about 20 years later died as the result of the injuries he had from the fall." Another rather gruesome tale describes a boy in frontier Utah run over by a wagon filled with "nearly a ton" of sand. The boy was badly crushed, but after "prayers" (blessings are not mentioned), he "began to gasp, and slowly began to swell back into his normal shape . . . he was kept in bed for a few days." The boy eventually walked again. These legends reflect a very naturalistic understanding of healing. They are not miracles if miracles require perfect restoration or instantaneous, complete healing. Rather, divine intervention seems to work within and prod the natural healing process, to bridge the narrow gap between death and the natural restorative processes of mortality.[50]

The most famous of these tales is one ascribed to Zeke Johnson, a Mormon and employee of the American Museum of Natural History, who in 1940 described an encounter he had while plowing a Native American burial site and pondering the mystery of resurrection. Johnson overturned

> almost a complete set of bones of a child . . . badly decayed but most all could be seen . . . I was startled to see the bones begin to move into place and take on natural color and the process

49 Cited in Bush, *Health and Medicine*, 95.

50 Folk Collection 8a, Group 7, Box 4, 1.3.6.10.1, 1.3.6.5.1, 1.3.6.2.1; Fife Folklore Archives.

> continued until the skeleton was complete . . . Then I see the marrow and the sinues and the regular mussles [sic] and juices of the joints then the inner parts all come to place then the flesh and skin to cover it. All a beautiful body with dark hair . . . Then it raise up and turned to face me and a beautiful white robe came across the left shoulder . . . and in just a few seconds the whole seen [sic] had vanished.[51]

This revival perfectly echoed Young's imagining—the body reconstituted as it was, building on what was left to restore only that which death had taken, following the paths of a natural healing process.

The second transformation that Mormonism imposed upon charismatic healing was the formalization and regularization that the growth of the church's membership and the increasing complexity of its organization demanded. This process did not eliminate the charismatic authority of religious experience; indeed, it made the literal truth of such experiences essential to the burgeoning movement. Smith promised his followers that the priesthood he conferred upon male Mormons allowed them access to the gifts of the Spirit. However, this formalization did make the legitimacy of miracles contingent upon the office of the one who claimed them. Miracles and priesthood office thus became mutually reinforcing, rationalizing each other. Just as natural theology brought healing into the realm of the rational, discoverable natural world, so did priesthood give human beings themselves control over such miracles and subordinate them into the systems of hierarchy that Joseph Smith built.[52]

In terms of the power to raise the dead, this began early, when the Quorum of the Twelve were granted the particular authority despite ongoing charismatic attempts to wield it. Indeed, the tension between charisma and authority existed in tandem for many years. Faith-based healing and resuscitation engaged in purely on the authority of faith and divine intervention—of the sort Joseph

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51 Mormon Collection 2:144, Fife Folklore Archives. See another version cited in Bush, *Health and Medicine*, 21.

52 The classic arguments about the formalization of religious charisma are Max Weber's; see, for example, Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building*, ed. S. N. Eisenstadt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 253–94.

preached to his delinquent elders at Commerce—persisted in Mormon history perhaps most memorably among Mormon women, who administered to each other absent the organization of the priesthood through the nineteenth century. As late as 1945, a Mormon named Hyrum Peck told the folklore scholar Austin Fife that once "at North Platte an awful storm came up and the lightning struck one man and killed him . . . my mother ran out and anointed him with olive oil and he recovered."[53] Peck's mother did not hold the priesthood, which was restricted to males—and, as with Orson Pratt's act of revival, there is no mention of any blessing beyond the anointing. However, in the nineteenth century such healing at the hands of endowed women was described by such leaders as Brigham Young and the prominent nineteenth-century Mormon Eliza R. Snow to be a function of faith rather than authority of priesthood office; as Louisa Richards reported Snow to say, women sealed blessings "not in the authority of the Priesthood, but in the name of our Lord and Savior."[54] That is, the status of women as non-priesthood-holders made them ideal subjects for preserving the evangelical understanding of miracle. Zina Huntington Baker, a plural wife of both Smith and later Young, had a particularly dramatic experience. While keeping vigil one night with the body of a neighbor, she was pondering "power, faith, and the possibility of the dead being brought back to life now as well as in the days of the apostles." She "felt that she had the faith to call the neighbor back from the dead," and "the dead man obeyed, and opened his eyes full wide and gazed into hers." Zina fled, and the corpse returned to lifelessness. According to historian Todd Compton, "She later explained to her children that the man was not meant to take up mortal life again, but God had allowed his momentary revival 'to show her that these signs do follow them that believe'"—a supernaturalist explanation that Bushnell or Wesley could have given, presenting God momentarily

53 Fife Mormon Collection 1, series 1, volume 1, number 96, in Folk Collection 4, Fife Folklore Archives; also see Linda King Newell, "A Gift Given, A Gift Taken: Washing, Anointing, and Blessing the Sick among Mormon Women," *Sunstone* 22 (Summer 1999): 35.

54 Newell, "Gift Given," 35.

suspending the natural order to demonstrate his divine authority absent any attempt at ritual by Zina herself.[55]

However, in the early years of the twentieth century, this sort of feminine charismatic authority was increasingly subordinated to the formalities of ordinance and ordination that Joseph himself set in place.[56] These rituals still carried the sense of the miraculous; however, they had been rationalized and reconceptualized, restricted to those males holding office in Joseph's church. No longer were they associated with the charismatic, experiential religion of the 1831 conference or Joseph at Commerce, with the hope for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that Mormonism inherited from Calvinist evangelicalism; rather, they worked at the formal behest of petitioners granted authority to seek spiritual gifts through ritual and ordination. An experience from the life of the Mormon historian Juanita Brooks, described in her once-bishop William Abbott's recollections of the death of her husband Ernest, illustrates something of this transition:

> Presently the father and the brother of the dead man came up to see me and they said . . . they believed that he was to be called back to life . . . I said, 'Brothers and sisters, I know that such things have been done and can be done again, but I am not certain what the will of the Lord is in this case. However, all who have faith that such can be may enter the room.' We formed a circle around the casket and I asked each to take his turn in prayer. 'But,' I said, 'I don't want any one of you to attempt to call him back unless you be moved upon to do so by the power of the Holy Spirit to do so.' We each took our turn in prayer and at or near the close of the session, Ernest's dear wife and his youngest brother Howard walked up arm in arm, knelt beside the casket. Each of them took a turn in prayer and they pled earnestly with the Lord to permit him to return. But all of no avail.[57]

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55 *Young Woman's Journal* 6 (1895): 376–381, cited in Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 75.

56 On this, see Newell, "Gift Given," 31–43.

57 William E. Abbott, *The Story of My Life* (St. George, UT: privately printed, n.d.), 52–53, cited in Levi Peterson, *Juanita Brooks: Mormon Woman Historian* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 53.

As historian D. Michael Quinn has documented, the function of such prayer circles (an integral part of temple worship, and eliminated outside of that context in 1978) was devotional, intended to harmonize the will of the participants with that of God. Such spectacular supernatural manifestations as raising the dead were not often sought, and indeed it seems clear in this story that Abbott sought the former and not the latter when he organized the mourners of Ernest into this prayer circle.[58] The use of the ritual in seeking such a miracle, however, is striking; Abbott clearly believed that it was a necessary intermediary to determine "the will of God in this case," whatever the result would be.

As the twentieth century continued, such unorthodox techniques of spiritual healing declined in the face of increased emphasis upon formal blessings pronounced by ordained priesthood holders, and everyday Mormon folklore increasingly bolstered the authority of the latter. Many such stories even seem to separate the power of the priesthood from the providence of God taught in natural theology and traditional Calvinist divine sovereignty, elevating the priesthood to an actual force in its own right separate from the will of God.

> A man . . . had a son who he loved very dearly. His son became quite ill and passed away. This man was very righteous and remembered the promise made by the Lord to give a righteous man his desires. He annointed . . . his son and commanded him to return to life. His son returned . . . but seemed to be unhappy . . . [he said] he had a work to do on the other side [and] begged his father to release him . . . [His father] told the Lord to take his son if it was his will. Shortly thereafter, the man's son passed away in his sleep.[59]

Other stories are harsher. Another bereaved father revived another dead child because "he couldn't stand the thought of losing her." However, "The little girl's spirit could not leave her body because of the power behind the blessing, but her body died and began to decay and

58 D. Michael Quinn, "Latter-day Saint Prayer Circles," *BYU Studies* 19 (Fall 1978): 79–105.

59 Folk Collection 8a, Group 7, Box 4, 1.3.5.2.3, Fife Folklore Archives.

smell. Finally the father was forced to admit that the Lord wanted his daughter and so removed the blessing and let the spirit leave the body."[60]

A final tale records the story of a woman who "flat out told the Lord that he could not take [her dying son] LaMar away from her . . . He did recover from the fever but had brain damage and has not progressed . . . She said that the reason LaMar had not progressed was her fault for daring to command God."[61]

Particularly striking in the latter two stories is the intertwining of natural theology and priesthood theology. The providences and intentions of God are carried forth through the working of the natural world; it is made clear that there are those "appointed to death," as section 42 put it, while the power of the priesthood—the formalized charisma of Joseph Smith—sustains those healed against the natural order of things. It is also significant that while these stories stress the power of the priesthood, they also make it clear that using it contrary to the will of God will gain only sorrow and punishment. In their own way, then, they elevate Mormonism's confidence in the importance of natural theology, and though they affirm the power of the formalized charisma of the priesthood, they direct Mormons to subordinate it to that way of understanding the will of God.

This need for rationality, for order, this sense of a divine will in things of life and death are reflected in a final brand of Mormon folktales, those describing not those who raised the dead but those who were raised. Many of these stories are recent, following the wider American interest in near death experiences in the post–World War II period that culminated in the publication of Raymond Moody's 1977 *Life after Life*. Moody's examination of dozens of near death experiences—vivid sensations and visions that persons who came close to death recovered to report—led him to describe several characteristics that he believed were typical in such cases, among them a sense of rising to heaven, often through a tunnel; encounters with spirits of the dead and spiritual beings; and a command to return to life despite wishing otherwise, commands which frequently invoked

60 Folk Collection 8a, Group 7, Box 4, 1.3.5.2.2, Fife Folklore Archives.

61 Tina Price, collector, "Miraculous Healings," no. 94, Wilson Folklore Archives, Brigham Young University Special Collections, Provo, Utah.

an affixed "time" that had not yet come.[62] Among Mormons, such characteristics hold. In Joseph Smith's own vision of the afterlife, preserved as section 137 of the Doctrine and Covenants, he saw his dead brother Alvin, just as Moody's patients saw their own deceased relatives. In one of the more famous Mormon stories of raised dead, Wilford Woodruff's wife, Phoebe, reported to her husband after he raised her from her deathbed that she had seen a vision of two angels who had come for her and charged her that she should return "if she felt that she could stand by her husband, and with him pass through all the cares, trials, tribulation and afflictions . . . for the gospel's sake." Similarly, some of Moody's patients reported being returned to Earth with a charge, though none with such an explicit emphasis on a particular religion.[63]

The observations of Craig Lundahl and Lester Bush add a particular Mormon tinge to this experience, after the fashion of the emphasis on fidelity to the faith in Phoebe's vision. As Bush reports, in addition to dead relatives and spiritual beings, Mormons frequently encountered Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, or other prominent deceased church leaders.[64] Further, the return to Earth was not simply impelled by a vague sense of one's time not yet having arrived, but by particularly religious and more, Mormon, duties. The story of a "sick stake president" is a good example: he tried to go through a door, but a man in a white robe stopped him, saying he wasn't ready yet. The person told him that he was to be made a patriarch.[65]

Another story describes a woman who, upon her death, "was told to go back because her genealogy was not done correctly in some of the sealing" work that she had done at the temple. She returned both to life and the temple, corrected her errors, and "was the only one killed" in an automobile wreck on her way home. Finally, a third story told of a farmer pinned under a tractor in his field. He saw a light and "was about to leave when he saw a man and woman spirit. They spoke

62 Raymond Moody, *Life after Life*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 2001).

63 Woodruff, *Leaves*, 54.

64 Bush, *Health and Medicine*, 20–30; Craig Lundahl, "The Perceived Other World in Mormon Near Death Experiences," *Omega* 12, no. 4 (1981): 319–27.

65 1.5.2.1.1.1 in Supernatural Religious Legends, Wilson Folklore Archives.

to him and told him that he had made a promise that he would provide them with bodies [by becoming their father]."[66]

All of these stories were collected in roughly the same period as Moody's work—the 1960s and 1970s. The light, the vision of spiritual beings, the sense of motion toward a place are all common. The specifics, however, are uniquely Mormon and convey a sense of that faith's "plan of salvation," an order to the world and to the lives of Mormons reminiscent of the God whose providence, as section 42 of the Doctrine and Covenants promised, presided over both the lives and deaths of human beings. They indicate to their listeners duties and missions unique to Mormonism but also stress the larger theme of providential history familiar to the Reformed Protestant heritage Mormonism is heir to; a God who works to preserve the natural course of the world he has set in motion.

By the middle years of the twentieth century, then, Mormon thought on the processes of raising the dead had attained a synthesis. As the apostle James Talmage wrote in 1921, echoing both Brigham Young and Mormon scripture, "we must do all we can, and then ask the Lord to do the rest."[67] This conception of God's involvement in human life is consistent with an often-invoked commentary on grace in the Book of Mormon's 2 Nephi 25:23: "It is after grace we are saved, after all we can do" and reflects a mature Mormon theology of works and grace. Soon after Talmage's statement, the general authorities of the church issued a letter entitled "The Healing of the Sick," in which members were instructed to pursue good health habits and not delay seeking trained medical care. At the same time, however, "we should send for the elders of the Church." Even after invoking all these methods, the letter warned, "with all your faith, we cannot expect to stop the course of nature, and oppose the will of Him who knows what is best for us."[68] Here, twentieth-century Mormonism revealed its debt to the providential natural theology of the Puritans and their

66 1.5.2.1.1 and 1.5.2.2.1 in Supernatural Religious Legends, Wilson Folklore Archives.

67 James E. Talmage, "Saints Urged to Prepare Themselves to Withstand the Ravages of Disease," *Liahona: The Elders' Journal* 19 (February 1922): 349.

68 As cited in Bush, *Health and Medicine*, 100–102.

evangelical descendents, which combined the will of God with the course of nature, and trusted in the efficacy of its own priesthood authority to pursue both.

5

Singular Phenomena

The Evolving Mormon Interpretation of Unidentified Flying Objects

Michael Scott Van Wagenen

> *Suddenly there appeared a cloud which hovered over the multitude, having a singular appearance, being accompanied with a terrible noise. The bustle and noise of the multitude was soon hushed, and a profound silence reigned in its stead, whilst every eye looked upon this singular phenomenon with wonder and astonishment. And behold there appeared a personage in sight that was descending through the ethereal sky, and bending his course towards the field that contained the multitude . . . This personage soon landed in the midst of the multitude. I drew near to him, to hear from whence he came, and I soon learned that he was from some distant planet.*[1]

For all of its modern-day resonance, the above narrative is not a description of a human-alien encounter from the twenty-first century. Instead, this is an 1841 article from *Times and Seasons*, the official newspaper of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Purported to be the visionary dream of a "believer in the scriptures," the account placed the author in the presence of an alien being who inquired about the Christian faith practiced on Earth.

1 The author would like to thank Monica Delgado, Dr. Frank B. Salisbury, Dr. Samuel Brown, and Marlee Spendlove for their feedback on this chapter. He also expresses gratitude to the numerous individuals who courageously shared their personal experiences so this study could be completed.

The account was originally published in *The Gospel Reflector*, January 1, 1841, and reprinted in *Times and Seasons*, May 15, 1841.

The teeming multitude presented the extraterrestrial visitor with so many contradictory doctrines that he turned away from them in disgust. The anonymous writer was left to ponder the fallen state of Christ's church and the lack of modern apostles and prophets. The inference to Mormon readers was that they had overcome this apostasy and possessed the fullness of truth for both terrestrial and celestial beings.[2]

The existence of extraterrestrial life has been a controversial element of *Mormon doctrine* and folklore since Smith founded his church in upstate New York in 1830. Claims abound that Smith preached that human life existed throughout the universe. One close associate of the Mormon prophet reported that he privately taught that the moon was inhabited by a race of people who dressed in the "Quaker style" and lived to the age of one thousand earth years. This unusual tenet was popularized after the church published it in *The Young Women's Journal* in 1892. Smith further theorized that both the biblical City of Enoch and the Lost Tribes of Israel existed on separate planets that had anciently broken off from the Earth. Smith's successor Brigham Young added to Latter-day Saint beliefs about extraterrestrial life when he publicly preached that the sun was similarly inhabited.[3]

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2 Although it is unclear if the original author was a Latter-day Saint, the newspaper editors clearly felt his account supported Mormon theology.

3 For life on the moon, see the unpublished journals of Oliver B. Huntington (Utah Historical Society) and Oliver B. Huntington, "The Inhabitants of the Moon," *The Young Woman's Journal* 3 (1892): 364–65. For belief that the City of Enoch and the Ten Tribes existed in space, see Eliza R. Snow, "Address to Earth," *Millennial Star*, September 1, 1851, 272; *Millennial Star* 1 (February 1841): 258; Bathsheba W. Smith, "Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith," *The Juvenile Instructor* 27, June 1, 1892, 34; and Orson Pratt to John C. Hall, December 13, 1875, in the LDS Church Historian's Office, quoted in R. Clayton Brough, *The Lost Tribes: History, Doctrine, Prophecies, and Theories About Israel's Ten Lost Tribes* (Springville, UT: Horizon Publishers, 2005). For teachings regarding life on the sun, see "Brigham Young, his Counselors, and the Twelve Apostles," *Journal of Discourses* (London: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1875), 13:271. Samuel Brown investigates Joseph Smith's "Chain of Being," which included all beings on earth and in the cosmos. See Samuel Brown, "The Early Mormon Chain of Belonging," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (forthcoming).

A fascination with unusual celestial events was also a part of the early Mormon experience. While such occurrences are now frequently linked to a belief in visitors from outer space, nineteenth-century Mormons kept their convictions about extraterrestrial life separate from their curiosity with flying objects in the sky. The singular phenomena witnessed in the heavens by nineteenth-century Mormons were generally believed to be signs of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ rather than evidence of life on other planets. This heavenly sign seeking eventually conflicted with Joseph Smith's evolving beliefs about the end of times, however, prompting him to ultimately denounce such ideas.

One hundred years after Smith's death, Mormons again gazed skyward as the world became fascinated with accounts of unidentified flying objects (UFOs) hovering above the mountains and plains of the American West. Utah's proximity to these events led to a resurgence of Mormon interest in ascribing theological significance to celestial phenomena. Latter-day Saint leaders likewise appropriated the language and symbols of UFOs in official church publications and sermons to appeal to the youth, assuage fears, and control the limits of orthodoxy. Such efforts failed to rein in popular ideas, however, and instead created a fertile field of folklore that yielded multiple beliefs about UFOs in the Mormon community.

In spite of its modern origins, the term *unidentified flying object* is merely a twentieth-century label applied to a phenomenon that has occurred throughout recorded history. Ancient Romans wrote about the "flying shields" and "luminous lamps" that they witnessed in the night sky. Many other early civilizations in Europe, Asia, and Africa also witnessed extraordinary celestial marvels. The Bible similarly contained references to unusual objects in the heavens. Jacob's Ladder, Elijah's Chariot of Fire, Ezekiel's Wheel, and the bizarre flying objects of the book of Revelation further point to long traditions of attributing religious meanings to UFOs.[4]

4 Jaques Vallee, *Anatomy of a Phenomenon: Unidentified Objects in Space—A Scientific Appraisal* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1965), 1–3; Holy Bible, Genesis 28:12, 2 Kings 2:11–12, Ezekiel 1, Revelation 8–10 (Authorized King James Version).

The point of this study is not to prove or disprove the existence of UFOs. It is an established fact that people see things in the sky that defy explanation. Some of these events are clearly naturally occurring phenomena while others remain shrouded in mystery. The origin of many of these mysterious objects has yet to be definitively established. Still, it is not essential to know the source of UFOs to appreciate what they teach us about the individuals and cultures who witness them. Two years before his death in 1961, the renowned Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung tackled the UFO question in his book *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky*. In this work, Jung acknowledged the existence of UFOs without ascribing any specific source to them. Rather, he claimed that "the appearance of real objects affords an opportunity for mythological projections."[5]

This chapter explores these mythological projections in a Mormon context. In the case of nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints, UFO sightings demonstrated their growing understanding of the natural world, along with their evolving views of the Second Coming of Christ, during the critical juncture between the Nauvoo period and their exodus into the Rocky Mountains. After a century of dormant interest, twentieth-century Latter-day Saints fused early doctrines regarding extraterrestrial life with popular notions of the earth being visited by alien spacecraft to find theological justification for the seemingly inexplicable events occurring in the heavens. The Mormon fascination with UFOs therefore demonstrates the flexibility of Joseph Smith's cosmology to meet the spiritual and intellectual needs of Latter-day Saints throughout the course of the church's existence.

This chapter first examines the impact of unexplained celestial phenomena on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints during its formative years under the leadership of Joseph Smith (1827–1844). A survey of nineteenth-century Mormon journals, letters, sermons, and official publications reveals a general interest in astronomical phenomena. The early Latter-day Saint periodicals *Millennial Star* and *Times and Seasons* showed particular interest in unidentified flying objects.

5 Carl Gustav Jung, *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1959), 146–47.

These sightings also proved to be key events in the conversions of some important church leaders.[6]

In 1827, three years before the official founding of the church, several future Latter-day Saints witnessed a dramatic display in the sky. Heber C. Kimball, who would become a trusted "Apostle" of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, witnessed the inexplicable event while in the company of Young's father and sister. He later recorded that they saw

> a white smoke arise toward the heavens; as it ascended it formed itself into a belt, and made a noise like the sound of a mighty wind, and continued southwest, forming a regular bow dipping in the western horizon. After the bow had formed, it began to widen out and grow clear and transparent, of a bluish cast; it grew wide enough to contain twelve men abreast.

This "bow" eventually filled with soldiers who engaged in loud and violent combat for several hours on the western horizon. Brigham Young's father, John, declared this unusual sighting to be a sure sign of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Years later, Kimball realized that this event occurred on the same day that Joseph Smith claimed possession of the gold plates from which he published the Book of Mormon. The unusual spectacle therefore took on an apocalyptic meaning associated with the restoration of the Latter-day Saint gospel.[7]

When mobs drove the Mormons from Jackson County, Missouri, in 1833, they were forced to camp out on the Missouri River Bottoms, where they lived under terrible hardship and suffered great anxiety about their future. On the night of November 12–13, the Mormon refugees were awoken by an unusual event described by church apostle Parley P. Pratt:

> All the firmament seemed enveloped in splendid fireworks, as if every star in the broad expanse had been hurled from

6 For one example, see the vision reported by future church president John Taylor in B. H. Roberts, *Life of John Taylor* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons, 1892), 28.

7 Mormon prophets govern the church with the help of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, in which Kimball faithfully served for over thirty years. Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball,* 1st collector's ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), 16–17.

> its course, and sent lawless through the wilds of ether. Thousands of bright meteors were shooting through space in every direction, with long trains of light following in their course . . . Every heart was filled with joy at this majestic display of signs and wonders, showing the near approach of the coming of the Son of God.[8]

Joseph Smith himself witnessed the event and wrote in his journal, "I arrose and beheld to my great joy the stars fall from heaven, yea they fell like hail stones a litteral fulfillment of the word of God as recorded in the holy scriptures and a sure sign that the coming of Christ is clost at hand." Although this Leonid meteor shower was an unusual occurrence, its natural origin was understood by the learned of the time. In the context of the afflicted Missouri Mormons, however, the event signaled the end of times when Christ would come relieve the suffering of his faithful Latter-day Saints. Ironically, the church's enemies interpreted the same event as confirmation that God wanted the Mormons driven from their state.[9]

Prominent church members continued to witness seemingly inexplicable occurrences in the heavens. On February 21, 1838, future church president Wilford Woodruff recorded that

> light commenced on the NE. & spread to the W. & soon rolled over head & also in the south & it centered in the heavens & rolled forth fire blood & smoke like contending armies: the whole heavens was illuminated with blood & fire for the space of half an hour & shook like a fowl upon the wing. It seemed at times as though the veil was about to rend twain <and the throne of God to appear> . . . This is one of the signs in the heavens in the last days spoken of by the ancient as well as modern prophets.[10]

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8 Parley P. Pratt, *The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, repr., ed. Parley P. Pratt Jr. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 83; see also Eliza R. Snow, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: *Deseret News*, 1884), 146–48; and B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, repr. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1965), 1:346–47.

9 Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 14; David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 10.

10 Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, ed. Scott G. Kenney (Midvale,

In spite of Woodruff being privy to the deeper doctrines of extraterrestrial life, he clearly saw this display as a sign of the coming of Christ rather than evidence of life on other planets.

Sightings of such phenomena were not limited to the United States. On July 14, 1841, a British convert named Thomas Tyler reported the following experience in West Bromwich, England:

> I beheld as it were a large brilliant star ascending and descending, and hovering and waiving in the air. It presented a variety of colours, and then changed itself to the brilliant form in which we first beheld it. The rays of it were extended as the rays of the sun: after this it expanded, and I beheld the face of a personage down to a little below the shoulder, and all of a sudden it unfolded down to the loins.

While contemporary believers in extraterrestrial life would describe such an intimate sighting as a "close encounter of the third kind," the *Millennial Star* reported the account under the heading "Remarkable Signs of the Second Advent."[11]

Another foreign sighting occurred while Apostle Orson Hyde was serving a mission in the Holy Land in 1841. Hyde was traveling between Beirut and Jaffa on a ship when he reported:

> As I was meditating on the deck of the vessel . . . a very bright glittering sword appeared in the heavens, about two yards in length, with a beautiful hilt, as plain and complete as any cut you ever saw. And what is still more remarkable, an arm, with a perfect hand stretched itself out and took hold of the hilt of the sword. The appearance really made my hair raise, and the flesh, as it were, to crawl on my bones. The Arabs made a wonderful outcry at the sight; 'O Allah, Allah, Allah!' was their exclamation all over the vessel.

This account is particularly interesting in that it had cross-cultural significance to the witnesses. While Hyde saw this as a sign of his Christian

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UT: Signature Books, 1983), 1:228.

11 *Millennial Star*, August 1841, 64. A "close encounter of the third kind" means that a witness has claimed actual contact with an extraterrestrial life-form. See Jerome Clark, ed., *The UFO Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1998), 1:207.

Savior, the Arabs who shared passage on the ship saw it as a sign of their Muslim God.[12]

Joseph Smith reported a similar apparition on March 10, 1843. At the time, he was with Apostles Willard Richards and Wilford Woodruff in Nauvoo, Illinois. He wrote:

> I discovered a stream of light in the southwest quarter of the heavens. Its pencil rays were in the form of a broad sword, with the hilt downward, the blade raised, pointing from the west, southwest . . . As sure as there is a God who sits enthroned in the heavens, and as sure as He ever spoke by me, so sure will there be a speedy and bloody war; and the broad sword seen this evening is the sure sign thereof.

While not specifically ascribed to Christ's Second Coming, Smith's flying sword was nonetheless apocalyptic, as it testified of the "wars and rumors of wars" attendant at the last days of the earth.[13]

Smith's sighting ushered in an unprecedented month of interest in celestial phenomena among the Latter-day Saints. The April 1, 1843, edition of *Times and Seasons* devoted seven articles to "singular phenomena" witnessed by Mormons and non-Mormons alike during the previous four weeks. Although some of these unusual displays were naturally occurring events such as "sun dogs," Latter-day Saints continued to interpret them in the context of their millenarian worldview.[14]

The most dramatic of these phenomena was witnessed by a riverboat captain named William Frances. On the night of March 21, 1843, Frances reported being blinded by an intense light while he was piloting a boat on the Mississippi River. The light emanated from a "Serpent in the sky" which proceeded to spell out the letters *G-O-D* in the firmament. These seven articles were followed by a large editorial titled "Signs of the Times," which elaborated on the significance of these heavenly portents.[15]

12 Orson Hyde, *The Travels and Ministry of Elder Orson Hyde* (Independence, MO: Joseph Smith Jr.'s Rare Reprints, 1990), 22–23.

13 Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), 5:300-301; Holy Bible, Matthew 24:6.

14 *Times and Seasons*, April 1, 1843.

15 Ibid.

In spite of such enthusiasm, events were transpiring that would soon dampen the celestial sign seeking of the Latter-day Saints. William Frances's sighting of the word *GOD* above the Mississippi River occurred on the very night believed by the followers of William Miller's Adventist movement to be the first possible date of the Second Coming of Christ. The coincidence compelled *Times and Seasons* to clarify that Frances was indeed a member of the church and not a Millerite. Joseph Smith had met with Miller's followers in Nauvoo just five weeks prior to Frances's sighting and informed them of the error of their ways. As events forced Smith to react publicly to Miller's prophecies, he began to reconsider the sign-seeking practices of his own church.[16]

In the five days between the publication of the phenomena-filled *Times and Seasons* on April 1 and the semiannual general conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Smith had a change of heart regarding heavenly portents. In his address to the church on April 6, 1843, he declared that the earliest Christ would return to the earth would be in 1890. He concluded his sermon with a discussion of the "signs in the Heavens above, and the earth beneath." The following day, Smith again addressed the Latter-day Saints and specifically attacked the fallacies of the Millerites and their predictions of Christ's return. He further decried the "prophetic numerology" that the Millerites employed to calculate the end of times.[17]

The next issue of *Times and Seasons,* on April 15, 1843, had a very different tone than that of two weeks earlier. One lengthy article issued a clear warning against Millerism and its corresponding sign seeking. Perhaps most telling was the May 15, 1843, issue of the newspaper. Under the heading "Remarkable Phenomenon," the editors reprinted

16 Faulring, *American Prophet's Record,* 303–4. For more information on Miller's movement, see Ruth Alden Dean, *The Miller Heresy, Millennialism, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987). Recent research by Samuel Brown and Nick Literski raises questions as to Frances's church membership. Nonetheless, most readers of the article would have interpreted his claim to be "a member of the church" as meaning he was a Latter-day Saint. Samuel Brown to the author, October 20, 2010.

17 Faulring, *American Prophet's Record,* 349–52; Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1993), 124.

an account of a "sun dog," a fairly common celestial event that creates the illusion of multiple suns in the sky. Rather than claiming this to be a sign of the latter days, the accompanying editorial stated: "Although the phenomenon . . . can no doubt be explained from natural causes, yet it will probably be seized upon by some persons as confirmatory of the prophesy of father Miller; and be viewed by others with superstitious dread." It seemed that Joseph Smith and the Latter-day Saints had turned a corner in their understanding of the natural world.[18]

Smith's exposure to Millerism may very well have discouraged his own tendencies toward attributing apocalyptic meanings to the events and objects that he and other Mormons witnessed in the skies. With one notable exception in January of 1844, when Elder William Martindale reported seeing a ball of light spell out the year *1860*, the Latter-day Saints focused much less on signs in the heavens. While *Times and Seasons* and the *Millennial Star* continued to reprint the occasional singular phenomena reported in other newspapers, Mormon reports seem to come to a halt for the remainder of the nineteenth century. There is little doubt that Mormons continued to see unexplained objects in the sky after the spring of 1843; but with the leadership frowning upon such reports, the official publications of the church fell silent on the topic.[19]

Perhaps the greatest evidence of the changing view of Mormons toward signs in the heavens was their reaction to a series of unexplained flying objects in the winter of 1896–97. On November 17, 1896, a "mysterious airship" was spotted over Sacramento, California. The spectacle created banner headlines as people from around the nation

18 *Times and Seasons*, April 1, 1843, 168–172; *Times and Seasons*, May 15, 1843, 207.

19 *Times and Seasons*, January 15, 1844. Historians such as Thomas G. Alexander, D. Michael Quinn, and Grant Underwood have explored the changing nature of Mormon mystical experiences, folk beliefs, and millennial philosophy during the early 1840s. The church's evolving interpretation of unidentified flying objects fits well within this historical timeline. Thomas G. Alexander, "Wilford Woodruff and the Changing Nature of Mormon Religious Experience," *Church History* 45 (March 1976): 56–69; D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View,* rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998); Underwood, *Early Mormonism*, 126.

began to report similar sightings. Since their initial interest in unusual celestial phenomena in the 1830s and early 1840s, much had changed for the Latter-day Saints. Most significantly, Joseph Smith had been murdered and subsequently replaced by a succession of far less mystical leaders. In addition, a majority of his followers had relocated to the Rocky Mountains. Mormon proximity to the Sacramento airship sightings no doubt caught the attention of the community. On the day of the first mysterious airship sighting, however, the church-owned *Deseret Semi-Weekly News* in Utah ran an editorial cautioning Latter-day Saints against trying to guess the time of Christ's Second Coming. Three days later, as word of the mysterious airships spread around the country, the newspaper ran an article under the heading "Dust Cloud in Space." This article discussed natural phenomena, such as meteor showers, entirely in a scientific context. Conspicuously missing were editorials discussing the signs of Christ's Second Coming.[20]

One week following the first report of the mysterious airships, the *Deseret Semi-Weekly News* finally ran two reprints of California articles about the airships. The stories ran with none of the theological speculation found in the early years of the church. An accompanying editorial instead noted that the *Sacramento Bee* had previously printed the story under "great scare headings." Perhaps most significant was the articles' placement within the newspaper. The stories appeared toward the end of the issue on pages 5 and 7. Interestingly, the newspaper's editors placed two articles about the discovery of ancient American ruins and relics prominently ahead of the airship stories. The time to search for signs of the Second Coming had clearly passed, as Latter-day Saints seemed much more interested in proving the validity of the ancient American civilizations described in the Book of Mormon.[21]

While the mysterious airships remained front-page news around the nation in November 1896 and April 1897, the *Deseret Semi-Weekly News* ran no more stories regarding the unusual sightings. The airships seemed to pass through the Mormon community with little additional

20 George Constable, ed., *The UFO Phenomenon, Mysteries of the Unknown Series* (Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1987), 18; *Deseret Semi-Weekly News*, November 17 and 20, 1896.

21 *Deseret Semi-Weekly News*, November 24, 1896.

notice. As the nineteenth century came to a close, Latter-day Saints were headed on a path of modernization. Old practices fell from prominence as Utah's pending statehood, the end of polygamy, and the move toward inclusion in the American political system forever changed Joseph Smith's church.

It was not only the Latter-day Saints who lost interest in unusual celestial events. The phenomena generally languished in American popular culture until reports of "flying saucers" made headlines again in 1947. Many well-publicized encounters with unidentified flying objects occurred in and around the Mormon population in the Intermountain West, eventually forcing church leadership to take a stand on the issue. Beginning in the early 1970s, Latter-day Saint leaders referred to UFOs in both semiannual general conference addresses and church periodicals, effectively expanding Mormon cosmology to explicitly include life on other planets. By fusing theology with highly speculative science, however, the church opened itself up to a wide variety of extraterrestrial folk beliefs within the Mormon community. A survey of these beliefs demarcates the prevailing boundaries of the modern Mormon cosmology and demonstrates the conceptual flexibility that is characteristic of Mormon thought and culture.

Modern interest in UFOs began when Kenneth Arnold, an airline pilot from Boise, Idaho, reported seeing the world's first "flying saucer" on June 24, 1947. Eight days later, one of these mysterious disks was reported to have crashed near Roswell, New Mexico. For mainstream Christians, the inability of their faith to account for UFOs was one of the more troubling aspects of the phenomenon. The Buchanan Brothers expressed this anxiety in their 1947 song "(You Got to Pray to the Lord) When You See Those Flying Saucers," crooning that "it may be the coming of the Judgment Day." Like nineteenth-century Mormons, many Christians could see no other explanation for these frightening events other than the end of times.[22]

22 Buchanan Brothers, "(You Got to Pray to the Lord) When You See Those Flying Saucers," RCA-Victor, 1947. Kevin D. Randle, *The UFO Casebook* (New York: Warner Books, 1989), 4–5. The Mormon cultural sphere is generally recognized to extend north from Utah into Idaho and south into Arizona.

Latter-day Saints of this era, however, adopted a different attitude. Folk beliefs about extraterrestrial life and the remembered sightings of odd celestial displays lingered beneath the surface of Mormon culture for over a century. As speculation grew about the role of extraterrestrial life in UFOs, Latter-day Saints could easily merge their religious folklore with popular attitudes about visitors from other planets. This process was accelerated by the fact that many significant UFO sightings occurred in Utah or in neighboring states with large Mormon populations.

Ten days following the Roswell incident, for example, the Page family of Salt Lake City was flying over Utah Lake in a private plane when it encountered a group of silver flying disks. These disks soared around their plane for a couple of minutes before suddenly disappearing. Afraid of negative publicity, the Pages at first told their story only to their family and friends. Rumors of such encounters filtered into the larger Utah community as the summer of 1947 continued to produce sightings around the country.[23]

In 1952, the most celebrated film footage of UFOs was shot near Tremonton, Utah. Five years to the day after the Roswell incident, a Navy officer named Delbert C. Newhouse drove with his family across the Beehive State. As they neared Tremonton, twelve large illuminated disks flew over their car. Newhouse watched the bizarre scene overhead in shock and disbelief. As the objects began to move away, he grabbed his 16-millimeter motion picture camera and shot several seconds of footage of the erratically flying objects. As a result of this event, Utah found itself in the midst of a UFO investigation unprecedented in its history. Numerous military investigators interviewed the Newhouses and scrutinized the footage. While the Air Force and CIA claimed the objects to be nothing more than seagulls, a Navy investigative panel concluded that the objects were self-illuminating and moving at speeds unknown to modern technology. The skies over Utah would continue to buzz with UFOs over the next several decades.[24]

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23 Utah Lake is approximately forty miles south of Salt Lake City. Zack Van Eyck, "Family saw silver discs zipping through Utah's skies," *Deseret News*, July 6, 1997.

24 Randle, *UFO Casebook*, 64–68. This event is chronicled in numerous sources due to its significance in UFO history.

One UFO cluster is deserving of particular attention. During the years 1966 and 1967, dozens of residents of Utah's predominantly Mormon Uinta Basin reported a rash of unusual lights and objects flying through the sky. Local junior high school science teacher and practicing Latter-day Saint Joseph Junior Hicks became interested in the phenomena and conducted numerous interviews with witnesses. Hicks eventually documented seventy-four separate events spanning five years. Hicks's research soon caught the attention of Dr. Frank B. Salisbury, a research biologist at nearby Utah State University. Salisbury, a Mormon graduate of the California Institute of Technology, was interested in applying scientific methods to the analysis of the Uinta Basin sightings. Using Hicks's files and conducting additional research of his own, Salisbury published *The Utah UFO Display: A Biologist's Report* in 1974. While not disputing the veracity of the accounts he documented, Salisbury was ultimately unable to pinpoint their origin. Privately, the scientist, along with many Latter-day Saints, wrestled with the theological implications of these unusual occurrences.[25]

Among the many sightings in and around Utah were two significant encounters that changed the dynamics of UFO reports in the United States. The first occurred on October 17, 1973, in the predominantly Mormon town of Lehi, Utah. On that night, a woman named Pat Roach claimed that tiny aliens entered her home and kidnapped her and her children. This event was especially significant since it was the first time anyone asserted that aliens entered a private residence and kidnapped its occupants. Prior to this time, encounters with UFOs were largely limited to sightings of unusual lights or objects in the sky. Beginning with Roach's story, however, witnesses alleged much more intimate interactions with strange creatures emerging from these supposed spacecraft. Reports included accounts of alien life-forms with a

25 Frank B. Salisbury, *The Utah UFO Display: A Biologist's Report* (Old Greenwich, CT: Devin-Adair, 1974). His ponderings prompted a continued interest in UFOs. In 2010, he published a revised and expanded version of his book. See Frank B. Salisbury, *The Utah UFO Display: A Scientist Brings Reason and Logic to Over 400 UFO Sightings in Utah's Uintah Basin* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2010). The author thanks Dr. Salisbury for his personal insight and thoughtful remarks regarding earlier drafts of this manuscript.

variety of unusual physical features such as gray skin, red eyes, pointed ears, crab claws, and metallic clothing.[26]

Two years later, in 1975, a Latter-day Saint named Travis Walton claimed an experience that captured the imagination of the world. On November 5, an unusual glow appeared above Walton and six friends as they were logging on the outskirts of the Mormon-founded town of Snowflake, Arizona. The friends would later state that a beam of light threw Walton to the ground as they fled the scene in fear. For the next five days, authorities searched for Walton's body, assuming that his companions had killed him and created the UFO story to cover up their crime. When Walton reemerged with fantastic stories of alien abduction, the public took notice. Walton subsequently wrote a book about his experience, which was later adapted into the major studio motion picture *Fire in the Sky*.[27]

During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, television programs and films like *Star Trek*, *E.T.*, and *Star Wars* introduced a new cosmic mythology to American popular culture. Alien life-forms, both monstrous and humanoid, became a part of the belief system of countless children and many of their parents. This greater cultural phenomenon proved equally influential within the Mormon community.[28]

In 1992, an independent researcher named James L. Thompson began querying Mormons about their experiences with UFOs and their beliefs about life on other planets. While his poll lacked scientific oversight, it is nonetheless a fascinating document that reveals much about modern Mormon attitudes toward UFOs and extraterrestrial life. Eight percent of responding Mormons claimed to have personally seen a UFO—a figure on par with the American population as

26 For an account of the month's activities as reported by witnesses, see Randle, *UFO Casebook*, 140–48. See also Zack Van Eyck, "Frequent Flyers? Those Aliens Do Get Around," *Deseret News*, June 30, 1996.

27 Travis Walton, *Fire in the Sky: The Walton Experience* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1996). Walton's church membership is confirmed at LDS Film, "Latter-day Saint (Mormon) Main Character: Travis Walton in the movie, *Fire in the Sky* (1993)," http://ldsfilm.com/movies/FireInTheSky.html.

28 Kent Nielson, "People on Other Worlds," *New Era*, April 1971, 12–18. Nielson acknowledged the influence UFOs were having on Latter-day Saint children and adults.

a whole. Over 25 percent knew someone who had alleged a UFO sighting. An amazing 85 percent of responding Mormons believed in "human-like life" on other planets, while half of those believed that aliens had traveled into the earth's atmosphere. Even if Thompson's polls are off a few percentage points, it is clear that UFOs figured strongly into the beliefs of many Latter-day Saints at the end of the twentieth century.[29]

By 1971, the editing boards of Latter-day Saint periodicals had noticed the growing impact of UFOs on the imagination of church members. To assure the Mormon faithful that Joseph Smith's restored gospel held the answer to these mysteries, they began a series of articles that addressed the issue of extraterrestrial life. An analysis of some of these articles demonstrates how Mormon leadership during this era attempted to connect the UFO phenomenon to the teachings of the church.

The first and perhaps most far-reaching article addressing extraterrestrial life was Kent Nielson's 1971 "People on Other Worlds," published in the *New Era*, a church magazine aimed at young adults. Nielson, a Brigham Young University professor, boldly claimed that

> not only do we know about the existence of people on other worlds; Latter-day Saints know also that people from other worlds visit the earth! Earth has been receiving visitors from outer space for years, and these visitors have been leaving highly intelligent messages for our benefit.

Nielson taught that these extraterrestrial visitors were angels and other heavenly messengers. By conflating Mormon mystical experiences with alien visitations, Nielson effectively merged science fiction and theology for thousands of young Latter-day Saints around the globe.[30]

Nielson also clarified what Mormons should expect extraterrestrial life to look like. He wrote that "the world may think of green, bug-eyed monsters, and science fiction movies may fascinate and enthrall, but they are pure fiction! People 'out there' are like people here, because we are all of the race of Gods." Such doctrines nullified

29 James L. Thompson, *Aliens & UFOs: Messengers or Deceivers?* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon Publishers, 1992), 11–20.

30 Nielson, "People on Other Worlds," 12.

the popular image of the monstrous alien while confirming that *Homo sapiens* life did, in fact, exist in the cosmos.[31]

Nielsen further probed the depths of Mormon cosmology by including this alien life within the scope of Christ's roles as a creator and savior. He wrote:

> Another basic truth is that all of the worlds out there are not the same. Some are celestial. Some are terrestrial. Some are telestial. Some, such as ours, are in a phase of temporal existence . . . We do not know how extensive is the order of heavens that pertain to our Lord Jesus Christ and that were created by him. It may consist of the local group of stars to which our sun belongs, or of our whole galaxy, or of our cluster of galaxies, or of all of the galaxies we have so far discovered.

This statement paralleled a folk belief of the time that maintained that Christ's sacrifice and atonement on Earth redeemed people living on all the planets of the universe. In his apocryphal "Book of Moses," Smith wrote that of God's populated planets, the people of Earth were the most wicked. Many Latter-day Saints therefore believed that God sent Jesus Christ to Earth because no other people in the universe were capable of killing this universal savior. This intersection of doctrine and folklore served the dual function of explaining the place of extraterrestrial life in the context of Mormon theology while also celebrating contemporary Latter-day Saints who lived righteous lives on the most sinful planet in God's creation.[32]

Nielsen's article also demonstrated how the Mormon hierarchy appealed to the interests of the youth by framing an element

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.; Joseph Smith Jr., "Selections From the Book of Moses," in The Pearl of Great Price, (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1988), 23. Chapter 7 verse 36 reports God declaring to Moses that "I can stretch forth mine hands and hold all the creations I have made; and mine eye can pierce them also, and among all the workmanship of my hands there has not been so great wickedness as among thy brethren." "Richard O." interview by the author, Salt Lake City, Utah, April 26, 2006. Richard recalled this idea discussed in his seminary class in Utah during the early 1980s. The author likewise remembers this topic being discussed in a Sunday school class in Los Angeles, California, during the same time period. Neither Richard nor the author recalls such conjecture beyond the 1980s.

of popular culture within a Latter-day Saint context. After all, who would Mormon children ultimately trust if science alone provided the answers about extraterrestrial life? To appeal to the growing UFO craze, both the *New Era* and the Latter-day Saint children's periodical *Friend* continued to infuse elements of astrophysics and science fiction into their publications during the 1970s and early 1980s. While this was hardly an official endorsement of an extraterrestrial origin for UFOs, at the very least it represented a concession to young Latter-day Saints' interest in the phenomenon.[33]

Perhaps not surprisingly, the church's adult-focused magazine *Ensign* also addressed the issue of life in the universe. This included two articles where belief in extraterrestrial life helped bring individuals to join the church. The most dramatic piece, however, was a transcription of President N. Eldon Tanner's address at the October 1972 semiannual general conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In a sermon titled "Warnings from Outer Space," this member of the church's governing First Presidency once again merged popular theories of extraterrestrial life with *Mormon doctrine*s. Speaking from the pulpit in the historic Mormon Tabernacle, President Tanner declared:

> Messages from the beyond have come in great numbers through the ages, faithfully interpreted by the Jeremiahs, the Ezekiels, and the Daniels; by the Nephis, and the Moronis; by the Peters, and the Pauls, and in modern times by the Joseph Smiths. Better than radioed or television communications have come personal messages without space capsule, plane, or rocket ship. Man has a long way to go before he comes into the realm of inhabited planets. Yet there is such a thing as space communication. Man has spoken to God and received answers from him. Such messages have been coming for the benefit and blessing of the inhabitants of the earth for upward of 6,000 years.

The growing interest in extraterrestrial life and UFOs had inspired the highest tier of Mormon leadership to appropriate the language

33 For examples, see "The Times of the Prophets," *New Era*, January 1972, 10–11; Richard G. Wilkins, "All'Italiana—The Italian Way," *New Era*, March 1978, 30; Sherwood B. Idso, "Visitors from Outer Space—Meteorites," *Friend*, January 1979, 11; Sherwood B. Idso, "Chiron: New Sibling of the Planets?" Friend, July 1979, 42–43; and "Paper Plate Flying Saucer," *Friend*, March 1981, 9.

of space visitations to assuage fears and appease the curiosity of the general membership of the church.[34]

In spite of church-sanctioned articles and sermons, tenets regarding life on other planets remained vague. While these sources made numerous inferences about alien visitations, the only explicit teaching to emerge was that *Homo sapiens* life existed on other planets. This doctrine served to confirm the original ideas of Joseph Smith regarding extraterrestrial life and provided Latter-day Saints with a reassuring explanation for a phenomenon that unnerved much of the Christian world.

Although American popular culture kept the specter of extraterrestrial life and visitation very much alive, Latter-day Saint leaders and publications fell silent on the issue after the mid-1980s. The reasons for this reversal are not entirely clear. It may be that the ascendancy of outspoken conservative Ezra Taft Benson to the Latter-day Saint presidency quashed such speculative impulses. It is also possible that the failure of the "UFO threat" to escalate beyond the late 1970s negated the need for church leadership to further allay anxiety about the phenomenon. Regardless of the reasons, it appeared to many observers that the renewed interest in extraterrestrial life was merely a passing trend with no lasting impact on contemporary Mormon theology or culture.[35]

In reality, the church's ambiguous teachings about UFOs created an environment that allowed for numerous folk traditions to emerge among the rank and file of the church. It is little surprise, then, that Latter-day Saints embraced and continue to accept a wide variety of views about the meaning and origin of UFOs. An analysis of Latter-day Saint attitudes regarding UFOs since the 1980s reveals the true

34 Judith Tannery Roiz, "I Knew There Had to be a Record," *Ensign*, March 1980, 52; Ken Shelton, "Allen Bergin: The Gospel Is a Continuing Revolution against the Standards of the World," *Ensign*, September 1983, 34–39; N. Eldon Tanner, "Warnings from Outer Space," *Ensign*, January 1973, 26–30. It is interesting to note that the online version of *Ensign* has removed the Roiz article from its database.

35 Benson became president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1985. The author's own observation of this trend is supported by both the oral history interviews and the lack of mention of extraterrestrial life in church publications and conference addresses since the mid-1980s.

diversity of thought within the church and demarcates the limits of mainstream belief within contemporary Mormonism.

On one extreme are the fringe beliefs of individuals who see UFOs as God's literal messengers traveling via spacecraft to the earth. The historian's office of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints holds thousands of pages written by Mormons who believe that UFOs and alien life-forms are an integral part of God's eternal plan. The most far-fetched writings are little more than rambling manifestos. In one, a self-proclaimed "Jewish Mormon King David" both claimed that UFO visitations proved his hierarchical claims to church leadership and witnessed that the Latter-day Saints should return to the practice of polygamy.[36]

Of a more interesting nature are the prolific writings of Kenneth Lloyd Larson, a Mormon living in Los Angeles, California. Larson's vast body of work supports the Mormon folk belief that the Lost Tribes of Israel and the City of Enoch were taken up into outer space. For forty years, Larson used the geographical location of noted UFO sightings to create a theoretical grid that overlays the Americas. According to Larson, specific points of intersection on these grids predict significant future events in the church.[37]

Early in his career, Larson wrote articles for the magazine *Flying Saucers: Mysteries of the Space Age*. When the UFO publishing craze died down during the 1980s, he began binding his theories into monographs that he donated to the church historian's office. His highly speculative geometry used the proportions of pyramids, the Seal of the United States, the gold plates, and numerous other objects to pinpoint the exact spot where the City of Enoch will someday return to the earth. His body of work fills thousands of pages that are bound into some twenty different volumes with pieces with titles such as "New Jerusalem: Space City of the Future."[38]

36 Louis Poda, "Teachings Concerning Polygamy, Extraterrestrial Beings, and World Affairs," copy held in the LDS Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, Utah.

37 A complete listing of his work is found in the LDS Church Historian's Office filed under the name of Kenneth Lloyd Larson.

38 Kenneth Lloyd Larson, "UFOs and More Surprising Date Patterns," *Flying*

Other Latter-day Saints have sought more credibility through publishing and distributing their personal theories about UFOs through private presses. In 1990, John Heinerman published *People in Space: Documented Extraterrestrial Life on Other Worlds*. Heinerman's thesis rehashed the theory that the Lost Tribes of Israel resided in outer space. Using a variety of nineteenth-century church documents and a tabloid newspaper as his sources, he weaved a more or less conventional tale of the ancient disappearance and modern reappearance of the lost sons and daughters of Israel.[39]

Dana Redfield's 1999 book *Summoned: Encounters with Alien Intelligence* fused her Mormon background with her current New Age belief system. Drawing upon hypnosis-recovered memories, Redfield claimed to have been in contact with extraterrestrials since her childhood. These alien life-forms, rather than supporting her Latter-day Saint beliefs, however, led Redfield to allege that they guided her down a different spiritual path:

> At the age of eighteen I experienced a sudden internal change that resulted in a break from the Mormon Church. I still can make no sense of it, except to wonder now if this unexpected fork in my life was alien-influenced, as a step in an 'initiation process' that began when I was very young.

In Redfield's case, Latter-day Saint theology was insufficient to explain the phenomena she believed she was experiencing and that led to her eventual apostasy.[40]

Saucers: Mysteries of the Space Age, October 1968, no. 60; Larson, "New Jerusalem: Space City of the Future," *Flying Saucers: Mysteries of the Space Age*, December 1971, no. 75; Larson, "The Super Spaceship: American UFO Report Sites Outline on Ground Huge, Ancient Spaceship Designs," *Flying Saucers: Mysteries of the Space Age*, March 1972, no. 76.

39 John Heinerman, *People in Space: Documented Extraterrestrial Life on Other Worlds* (San Rafael, CA: Cassandra Press, 1990). On page 2 of People in Space, Heinerman references the *Weekly World News* as a source. This tabloid is better known for its sensational claims that Hitler remains alive and that a hybrid "Bat Boy" stalks the dark byways of America.

40 Dana Redfield, *Summoned: Encounters with Alien Intelligence* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing, 1999) 70.

While alleged alien encounters drove Redfield from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, other Mormons have found their faith boosted by their belief in extraterrestrial life. One example is James L. Thompson, the man who conducted the Mormon UFO polls cited above. During the 1990s, Thompson found his spiritual mission in warning Latter-day Saints about the dangers of alien spacecraft. In his two books, *Aliens & UFOs: Messengers or Deceivers?* and *Alien Encounters: The Deception Menace*, Thompson declared that extraterrestrial visitations were both real and commonplace. Rather than considering them a benevolent or benign force, however, Thompson argued that these visitors were in fact a tool of Satan used to discourage and distract mortal men from their divine mission. While his UFO theories remain impossible to corroborate, the data he collected has nonetheless provided a valuable window into the folk beliefs of modern Mormons.[41]

Finally, there is another group of Mormons who eschew the sensationalism of the manifesto writers and the emotion of New Age practitioners in favor of more scientific methods. The Utah chapter of the national Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) seeks to promote "the scientific study of UFOs for the benefit of mankind." Given the controversial nature of UFO research, many in mainstream science predictably question the methods and conclusions of MUFON. In spite of such skepticism, the Utah chapter meets monthly to discuss and debate various aspects of the paranormal world. While few members of MUFON claim to be practicing Latter-day Saints, many within the group originate from Mormon backgrounds. These members often credit their early exposure to Latter-day Saint doctrine and folklore related to extraterrestrial life as inspiring their interest in the field. As mainstream Latter-day Saints abandoned doctrines related to extraterrestrial life in the mid-1980s, however, they chose to remain faithful to their belief in UFOs.[42]

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41 Thompson, *Aliens & UFOs*, and *Alien Encounters: The Deception Menace* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon Publishers, 1995).

42 The author attended a MUFON meeting held at the Hunter Library in West Valley City, Utah, on April 22, 2006, and conducted surveys and oral history interviews with the members of the group. Most claimed Mormonism as their

At the heart of contemporary UFO research in Utah is David Rosenfeld, the founder of the Utah UFO Hunters. Known by friend and critic alike as "Alien Dave," Rosenfeld has provided a virtual gathering place for Utah UFO discussion at his website, AlienDave.com. Rosenfeld was raised in a Latter-day Saint household in Salt Lake City, Utah. Like many who have a passion for UFOs, his interest grew out of his own alleged close encounter with alien lifeforms. While no longer practicing in the Mormon faith, Rosenfeld posted an article on his website explaining the theory of the Lost Tribes of Israel dwelling in outer space. Much to the dismay of his LDS readers, he also posted a letter written by a woman who claimed that deceased Mormon prophet Gordon B. Hinckley was a reptilian alien who ate human children. Rosenfeld has taken a neutral stand on such allegations, claiming that his website is merely a forum for discussion rather than an exclusive platform for any one group's cosmology.[43]

While some critics have excused Rosenfeld as a well-meaning but misguided researcher, there is one individual in the Mormon community whose controversial views are bolstered by his success in the business world. Joseph Firmage is a communications innovator from the Holladay section of Salt Lake City. As a teenager, he began a computer programming tools company that he eventually sold to Novell for twenty million dollars. His next business start-up was valued at three billion dollars at its public offering in 1997. The following year, Firmage received Silicon Valley's "Young Entrepreneur of the Year" award from Ernst & Young. At the age of thirty, Firmage had proven himself one of the greatest minds of his generation.[44]

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cultural background rather than their current religious beliefs. MUFON's goals are outlined at http://www.mufon.com.

43 The Utah UFO Hunters Investigative Team, http://www.aliendave.com/article_UFOmormonsAliens.html; The Utah UFO Hunters Investigative Team, "The Shapeshifting Reptilian Mormon Brotherhood," http://www.aliendave.com/Article_ShapeshiftReptilian.html; The Utah UFO Hunters Investigative Team, "Copyright Policy," http://aliendave.com/Copyright_policy.html.

44 Firmage's online biography is archived at http://web.archive.org/web/20051215150610/http://www.manyone.net/about/management/joe- firmage.html .

In the midst of these distinguished accomplishments, Firmage reported an event that drastically changed his life. After contemplating an article he had just read on theoretical physics, he found himself in the midst of a dramatic visionary experience. According to Firmage, a "visitor clothed in white" appeared to him in an "oval of light" and directed him to pursue research into space travel. Since that time, Firmage has been a significant force in the world of theoretical propulsion technologies. His new mission earned him the scorn and derision of many of his peers. Many have questioned his mental health, calling him "nuts," "crazy," and more popularly, "the Fox Mulder of Silicon Valley." Firmage ignores the criticism and remains resolute. While not currently a practicing Latter-day Saint, Firmage claims his beliefs are nonetheless grounded in the teachings of Joseph Smith, B. H. Roberts, and other early Mormon leaders.[45]

While outside the mainstream of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Rosenfeld, Firmage, and other believers in the UFO phenomenon point to their Mormon upbringing as supporting their less-than-orthodox scientific views. Youth seminary classes, Sunday school lessons, and late-night missionary chats all proved to be fertile ground for Mormon speculation about UFOs and extraterrestrial life. This is particularly true for Latter-day Saints who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s when church leaders fused official doctrine with UFO-inspired popular culture.[46]

Latter-day Saint co-opting of science fiction has ultimately proven to be a two-way street. In 1978, Latter-day Saint television producer Glen A. Larson created the successful television series *Battlestar Galactica*. Larson, more than any other individual, has been the most influential in combining American popular culture with Mormon cosmology. As

45 Fox Mulder was a UFO-obsessed character in the popular *X-Files* television series (1993–2002). Joseph Firmage, telephone interview by the author, April 7, 2006; CNN, "Silicon Valley CEO continues alien quest despite skeptics," http://www.cnn.com/US/9901/12/planetary.executive/; "CEO Quits Job Over UFO Views," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 9, 1999.

46 Firmage interview; "Richard O." interview; "Matt," interview by the author, Salt Lake City, Utah, April 22, 2006; "Martha," interview by the author, Salt Lake City, Utah, April 22, 2006. Thompson found that belief in UFOs increased significantly in this generation. See Thompson, *Aliens & UFOs*, 19.

writer and producer of the series, he crafted a tale of lost tribes originating on the planet "Kobol"—an obvious reference to the planet "Kolob" that Joseph Smith designated as being nearest the realm of God.[47]

The pilot episode, "Saga of a Star World," began with a graphic stating that "the Galactica's Commander, Adama, intends to search for a lost thirteenth tribe who inhabit planet Earth." Adama is a member of a quasi-Mormon "Quorum of Twelve" who rule these extraterrestrial humans. The characters in *Battlestar Galactica* frequently mention prayer, the everlasting nature of the soul, eternal marriage, and a hieroglyphic scripture known as the *Book of the Word*. Each of these elements parallels Latter-day Saint beliefs and doctrines. Not surprisingly, many Mormon believers in visitors from outer space cite *Battlestar Galactica* as helping to legitimize their theories during the late 1970s and early 1980s.[48]

Network television is not the only entity to borrow from the Mormon cosmology. "UFO cults," which make extraterrestrial contact a central tenet of their theology, have also appropriated Mormon history for their own religious beliefs. Joseph Smith's "First Vision" of God and Jesus Christ is a favorite among those who look for religious meaning in space visitation. When Smith's account is removed from its Mormon context, it becomes clear why the UFO cults are drawn to the story:

> I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me . . . When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air.

Bright beams of light and hovering beings are standard conventions in modern UFO abduction narratives.[49]

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47 Joseph Smith Jr., "The Book of Abraham," in The Pearl of Great Price (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1988), 34–35.

48 *Battlestar Galactica*, "Saga of a Star World," originally aired September 17, 1978. These two elements are first seen in episode 2, "Lost Planet of the Gods," originally aired in September and October 1978. *Battlestar Galactica* was a commonly discussed theme with many of the Utah MUFON interviewees.

49 Joseph Smith Jr., "Joseph Smith—History," in The Pearl of Great Price (Salt

The idea of Joseph Smith being visited by alien beings seems to originate in the 1977 edition of the magazine *Ancient Astronauts*. This "Official UFO Special" contained an article by Paul Hugli titled "Mormon Leader Joseph Smith was Visited by Spacemen." Rather than enter the polemical debate over the divine or fraudulent origin of Smith's vision, Hugli offered a third option, explaining that "Mormonism is surrounded by supernatural phenomena and experiences which suggest the presence of ancient astronauts." Addressing Joseph Smith's "First Vision," the author claimed that

> the term, 'a pillar of light'—is often associated with visions of the Lord and believed, by supporters of the ancient astronaut theory, to represent . . . a beam of light radiating from the UFO . . . with two UFOnauts (crewmen of the UFO) descending upon Smith on an anti-gravity beam.

Hugli concluded that Joseph Smith was "contacted by the same ancient astronauts who talked to Ezekiel and Moses and they told him to pick up where the Bible left off—with the Book of Mormon!" In this context, both the Holy Bible and the Book of Mormon were alien-inspired texts rather than the workings of a Judeo-Christian God.[50]

The Raelians are perhaps the best-known UFO cult to accept Joseph Smith as an extraterrestrial conduit. Founded by French journalist Claude "Rael" Vorilhon in 1973, the Raelians rose to international prominence in 2004, when they claimed to have cloned a human baby. Rael taught that Joseph Smith was the offspring of a mortal woman and an "extraterrestrial scientist" known as an "Elohim." According to the Raelians, Smith is currently living in an alien spacecraft, waiting for the day when he and thirty-eight other chosen prophets will return to the earth with their Elohim creators.[51]

Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1988), 1:16–17.

50 Paul Hugli, "Mormon Leader Joseph Smith Visited by Spacemen!" *Ancient Astronauts* (Official UFO Special) 1977, 35.

51 The claim proved to be a hoax; see CNN, "Raelian leader says cloning first step to immortality," http://archives.cnn.com/2002/HEALTH/12/27/human.cloning/index.html; Susan Jean Palmer, "Women in the Raelian Movement: New Religious Experiments in Gender and Authority," in *The Gods Have Landed: New Religions from Other Worlds*, ed. James R. Lewis (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995), 106–7.

In spite of the allegations of groups like the Raelians, it is doubtful that the mainstream of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will ever embrace the Joseph Smith–alien visitation theory. While Mormons (and other inquisitive humans) are prone to speculation regarding the origin of UFOs, the majority of church members take no ideological stand on the issue. Fittingly, when Dr. Frank B. Salisbury published an expanded and revised edition of *The Utah UFO Display* in 2010, he clarified his position, stating, "I no longer try to apply LDS theology to my understanding of UFOs." As it was during Joseph Smith's time, more rational interpretations of the natural world continue to trump old doctrines. Since the 1990s, church leaders have explicitly taught that the Lost Tribes of Israel remain scattered among the human populations of the earth. Although this contradicts the beliefs of early Mormons, it nonetheless posits a more credible scenario that appeals to modern Latter-day Saints. Notwithstanding the fact that many Mormons remain open to the idea of *Homo sapiens* extraterrestrial life, this belief is now locked within a more conservative and scientifically informed cosmological context.[52]

In spite of these evolving interpretations, the mythical projections of Latter-day Saints upon UFOs have served a vital function within the community. By giving meaning and order to the unknown natural world, celestial marvels have ultimately assured Mormons of the correctness of their path and given them a sense of security in troubling times. Early sign seeking revealed a powerful and enduring Mormon impulse to prove the truthfulness of their newfound theology. In the

52 Salisbury, *The Utah UFO Display*, 2010, 17. Examples of modern mainstream thought regarding the Lost Tribes of Israel can be found in Paul K. Browning, "Gathering Scattered Israel: Then and Now," *Ensign*, July 1998, 54–61; Dallin H. Oaks, "All Men Everywhere," *Ensign*, May 2006, 77–80; Erich Robert Paul, *Science, Religion, and Mormon Cosmology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 197. Paul points out that Mormons shun the popular notion of alien life and continue to embrace their belief in Homo sapiens life on other planets. This is supported by the reactions that Rosenfeld has received from mainstream Mormons and by the author's Internet query regarding Mormon belief in UFOs. Also it is worth noting that while the author worked in the LDS Church Historian's Office, each request for UFO-related documents was met with grins and suppressed laughter. The author extends his eternal gratitude to William "Wild Bill" Slaughter for attempting to take such queries seriously.

midst of persecution, lights in the night sky also gave beleaguered Latter-day Saints hope that Christ would soon return to relieve them of their earthly suffering and exalt them in his kingdom. After observing the followers of William Miller's Adventist movement, however, Smith realized the folly of predicting the end of times. Heavenly sign seeking therefore came to conflict with Smith's evolving view of Christ's return, prompting him to discourage its practice. For the next century, Mormons were content to ascribe such singular phenomena to natural laws, and to seek evidence of their faith elsewhere.

The UFO craze of the second half of the twentieth century forced Latter-day Saints to consider again marvels in the sky. Mainstream Christian theology provided no elucidation of the phenomenon, leaving believers frightened and confused. Mormons, however, were able to draw upon Joseph Smith's early doctrines to explain the existence of life on other planets. In a gospel that purported to "restore all things," this privileged knowledge reassured Latter-day Saints that extraterrestrial life posed no threat to the earth and was merely a part of God's plan in the last days. As the millennium came to a close, the church again fell silent on the topic. While a majority of Mormons have averted their gaze from the heavens, should the need arise for future Latter-day Saints to again look skyward, they will no doubt find solace by interpreting the mysteries of the natural world within the context of Smith's expansive cosmology. Indeed, this theological adaptability is a hallmark of Mormonism and remains an important component of its enduring appeal in the twenty-first century.[53]

53 Holy Bible, Matthew 17:11.

6

A Currency of Faith

Taking Stock in Utah County's Dream Mine

Kevin Cantera

In May 2007, a crowd assembled in the convention hall at the veterans' center in Spanish Fork, Utah, for the Relief Mine Company's annual stockholders' meeting. An almost festive air preceded the official meeting, as about one hundred people gathered, investors in the company who had come to hear the annual financial report on the 113-year-old mining venture. Chatter and laughter filled the hall; conversations sprang up where they had left off at last year's stockholders' meeting. The majority of stockholders were older people from the surrounding area in southern Utah County, where the Relief Mine is located. A handful of stockholders came from farther away; some were from Salt Lake City, about fifty miles to the north, others from neighboring Idaho. Nearly all were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or Mormons. Many brought children and grandchildren, some of whom ran between rows of chairs, playing tag. Relief Mine stock, since becoming available in 1909, has become something of a family heirloom, passed down from one generation to the next, and the meeting had a distinct family feel. One family had a table of books for sale, including an eschatological history of the Relief Mine. A husband-and-wife team moved about the crowd, striking up friendly conversation and handing out brochures describing various end-time prophecies

and their imminent fulfillment. Two old friends reclined in folding chairs, sunburned in their well-worn jeans and dusty work boots, swapping prophecies about the Last Days.[1]

Despite the cheerful air that preceded it, the official meeting was short and solemn. Company secretary Ray Koyle, a great-grandson of the man who had founded the mine in 1894, conducted the business of the day. It was a process that took only a few minutes because the Relief Mine Company—known locally as the "Dream Mine"—does little business. In fact, the company has done no actual mining for over four decades; it has few operating expenses and brings in only a scant income. The total fixed assets of the Relief Mine Company were just over $3.5 million for 2006, according to Koyle's review of the balance sheet and profit-and-loss statement. Total net income for the year was about $41,000, coming largely from rents collected on property and revenue from a small gravel pit the business operates. After his quick accounting, Ray Koyle called for the assembly to pray and on adjournment asked "everyone gathered here to take note of their feelings about this project. Let's focus on next year, and wait."[2]

Waiting is something that Dream Mine stockholders have practiced repeatedly. In the nearly one hundred years since the operation went public, shareholders have never received a dividend. During that time, the mine has never produced a significant profit. The "Dream Miners" have never unearthed a single ounce of valuable ore.[3]

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1 The May 14, 2007, meeting was open to the public and attended by the author, who took notes and conducted a number of spontaneous, casual conversations and interviews with attendees. The stock first sold in 1909 under the name Koyle Mining Company; the company reorganized in 1961 as Relief Mine Company, allowing existing shareholders to transfer their stock.

2 Relief Mine Company annual stockholders' meeting, May 14, 2007, Spanish Fork, Utah.

3 Officers in the company as well as a number of stockholders would argue the point. At various times in its history, the company has published assays showing moderately valuable deposits of gold and platinum ore; however, a number of independent analyses of samples from the mines have always contradicted those tests and shown negligible amounts of valuable minerals. For an examination of the assay tests done of Dream Mine samples, see James P. Christianson, "An Historical Study of the Koyle Relief Mine" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1962), 124–27.

Nevertheless, stockholders remain committed. At present, at least 706 people own stock in the Relief Mine Company, and investors seeking to purchase a stake in the mine happily place their names on a waiting list for the chance to pay $30 to $35 for a single share—shares with a real value, by the most generous accounting, of less than $10 each.[4]

Stockholders willing to talk about the mine typically discuss their unrealized investment with a sense of awe and reverence, often expressing the strong tie they have to their stake in the company. L. DeLynn "Doc" Hansen, a Utah County native, bought his first piece of the Relief Mine—one hundred shares—in 1980 for $3 a share. "I was new in practice, and we were poor," Hansen, a chiropractor, remembers. "I just pulled out the three hundred dollars and said, 'Here you go.' My wife didn't even question it, our last three hundred dollars to our name and she didn't even question it."[5]

Why, despite the lack of any measurable success, does Relief Mine stock remain an object of desire? Beyond any material value, what does the mine reveal about Mormon belief? How has its meaning changed over time? Such questions demand context. To ascertain the real value of Dream Mine stock, this essay will explore the community of Dream Mine believers who look beyond the material world to a confirming past and the promise of the future. For them, the mine's true pot of gold exists not in a material world, but in a world yet to come. Although they were in the mainstream of the LDS Church at the beginning of their quest in the early twentieth century, over time Dream Mine believers would diverge from Mormon orthodoxy and

4 It is difficult to determine the exact number of stockholders who have bought and sold shares since the company went public in 1909, because stock that has not been registered with the company is typically not counted in the official company tally. The above number of stockholders in 2007 comes from the figures cited by Ray Koyle, company secretary, at the May 2007 stockholders' meeting. The actual number of people who possess shares is thought to be considerably higher, perhaps closer to 2,000. According to the company, there are 463,000 "active" shares outstanding on the Relief Mine. With a net worth of $3.5 million, the one-to-one "real" value of each share is $7.56. In fact, the total number of shares in circulation is likely to be closer to 700,000, according to numerous sources, including Christianson, "Koyle Relief Mine," ix.

5 L. DeLynn "Doc" Hansen, interview by author, October 26, 2007, Orem, UT, tape recording.

have to draw sustenance from other religious communities to sustain their faith.

Excavating Belief: Faith, Function, and the Dream Mine

On a warm September day in 1894, John Hyrum Koyle drove a pick into the rocky soil of a cone-shaped mountain that overlooked a wide swath of farmland along the southeastern shore of Utah Lake. Koyle knew exactly where to dig. A Mormon bishop who led a congregation known as a ward, Koyle claimed to have received a nighttime visitation from the Angel Moroni, the same heavenly messenger who had visited Joseph Smith decades earlier and then led the founder of the LDS Church to unearth a set of ancient gold plates that became the Book of Mormon. Moroni raised Koyle into the air and brought him into a mountain, through more than one thousand feet of solid rock, until the angel focused the bishop's attention on a formation of thick, white quartz with an unmistakable vein of gold, valuable ore so accessible that it looked "like a fish ready for the frying pan."[6]

The Angel Moroni instructed Koyle that God had chosen him to open the mine under the mountain, but told him that the gold would not "come in" until the Last Days, before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. God had ordained the gold to provide relief for Latter-day Saints during the days of trials and tribulations before the Millennium. Koyle promised believers that the mine would finance the literal gathering of Israel. A week later, Koyle and a small band of Utah County Mormons began digging into the mountain in earnest, proclaiming their excavation the "Dream Mine."

Historians and folklorists have examined the Dream Mine narrative, offering interpretations of a story that continues to inspire faith,

6 Norman C. Pierce, *The Dream Mine Story* (Salt Lake City: privately printed, 1972), 12. This is Pierce retelling the story "as [Koyle] told it to hundreds of us so many times," 8. Though referred to as "dreams," Koyle's nighttime visitations and experiences are taken as literal events by believers. Over the years, a joke developed among some of Koyle's detractors, who said that on nights Koyle's wife served liver and onions he would have a new "dream" or revelation; see Christianson, "Koyle Relief Mine," 31.

but the most important primary sources for these scholars come from the true believers who followed Koyle. With Koyle leaving no written account of his life, the work of publicizing his calling was taken up by two stockholders who were convinced of the prophecies concerning the mine. Norman Pierce styled himself a "preserver" of the story and saw God's hand in the mine. Ogden Kraut, who worked at the mine in the 1940s, called Koyle the only prophet he had ever met. In his self-published chronicle of the Dream Mine, Kraut gave voice to the belief of many stockholders, declaring: "John H. Koyle was a man of simple faith and education, but he had a gift from God . . . His prophecies were not given for entertainment or curiosity; they were meant to convey a message of warning."[7]

As chroniclers of the Dream Mine, Pierce and Kraut reconstructed the history of the mine and its founder to echo important narratives from their Mormon faith. They deliberately crafted Koyle's history to mirror that of Mormon founder Joseph Smith and they intentionally retold the mine's story in a way that reverberated with well-known accounts of LDS origins. Koyle himself was divinely instructed "never to make a written statement" about the mine, leaving Pierce and Kraut to rely on conversations with the faithful and Koyle himself. Pierce began compiling notes in 1934 for what would become *The Dream Mine Story*, a narrative he constructed from stories "repeated again and again by leading stockholders with some variations." Pierce freely admitted that "it was not always easy to pin down the true and correct version every time" but nonetheless fashioned a story designed to mirror the founding miracles of Mormonism and thereby engender belief in Koyle's mine.[8] Kraut knew the mine's founder only briefly, and based his retelling of the story on Pierce's book and tales related by fellow believers. For both, the story of John Koyle and the Dream Mine was a narrative that echoed Mormonism's origins and paralleled the life of LDS founder Joseph Smith. In their hands, the Dream Mine narrative hearkened back to the founding of the one true church

7 Ogden Kraut, *John H. Koyle's Relief Mine* (Dugway, UT: Kraut's Pioneer Press, 1978), 186.

8 Pierce, *Dream Mine Story*, i–ii.

and glowed with the fervor of divine authority.[9]

Norman Pierce and Ogden Kraut never doubted the mine because its dreamer and his vision were embedded in the Mormon world. Their narratives rely on Mormon themes. John Hyrum Koyle was the son of two Mormon pioneers: John Hyrum Koyle Sr. and Adlinda Hillman. They were born in Nauvoo and made the trek westward to Utah as children, growing up in the Mormon "colony" of Spanish Fork. John, the couple's second child, was born on August 14, 1864. Within four years of his birth, Koyle's family received a mission call from LDS president Brigham Young, sending them to the so-called Muddy Mission nearly four hundred miles away in southern Utah, where church authorities hoped to establish a cotton colony. Life on the Muddy River was hard, and no doubt the early years of Koyle's life saw many hardships as agricultural failures and near-starvation plagued the venture. LDS authorities in Salt Lake City eventually abandoned their plan for the Muddy Mission and the "colonists" were allowed to return home. The Koyle family moved back to Spanish Fork in 1871 with little to show for their efforts.[10]

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9 Other Dream Mine sources include Christianson, "Koyle Relief Mine," which included interviews with Koyle's family and a number of the earliest stockholders. The mine has surfaced in D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), 210–11; John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology*, 1644–1844 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 297; and Jon Krakauer, *Under The Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith* (New York: MacMillan, 2003), 93–97. The mine, in these accounts, warrants mere passing reference and is used to illustrate specific points. Mormon folklorist Wayland D. Hand placed the story of the Dream Mine within the broader realm of Utah mining lore: Wayland D. Hand, "Magic and the Supernatural in Utah Folklore," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16 (Winter 1983): 60; see also Wayland D. Hand, "Folklore From Utah's Silver Mining Camps," *Journal of American Folklore* 54 (July–December 1941): 132–61. Meanwhile, Austin Fife and Alta Fife, *Saints of Sage and Saddle: Folklore Among the Mormons* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1980), recounted the story of Koyle and the mine as part of a catalog of Utah folklore. Another important account of Dream Mine folklore is Joe Stanley Graham, "The Dream Mine: A Study in Mormon Folklore" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1970).

10 Pearson Starr Corbett, "A History of the Muddy Mission" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1968). See also W. Paul Reeve, *Making Space on the Western Frontier: Mormons, Miners and Southern Paiutes* (Urbana: University of

As a child, John Koyle developed a reputation as a pious boy who often reminded his elders of their duties to the Mormon faith. By age fourteen, he had forgone a formal education and begun making his living as a mule skinner, traveling throughout southern Utah County by mule and cart, selling various goods to farmers. In 1884, the year he turned twenty, Koyle married Emily Arvilla Holt. The newlyweds moved onto a farm in the lush river bottoms south of Spanish Fork, in a tiny settlement known as Riverside, which would later be called Leland.[11]

Though raised in a devout LDS household, and despite his reported faithfulness, Koyle could not testify to a "burning in the bosom" about the truth of the Book of Mormon and LDS theology.[12] In accordance with Mormon belief, and in search of a deeper faith, the young man began to pray earnestly. He withdrew to a small grove of willow trees near the Spanish Fork, dropped to his knees, and beseeched the Lord for the worthiness to receive, through the Holy Ghost, an unwavering testimony of faith. But when he rose from his knees he was crestfallen. He "noticed nothing different than when he began to pray. No answer seemed eminent [*sic*], nor was any further testimony obtained."[13]

But God did answer him in a mysterious way that assured his faith. Pierce tells of Koyle's dream that night, one preceding his encounter with the Angel Moroni. In this dream, Koyle recalled seeing a cow, a

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Illinois Press, 2006), 86–90, and Henry B. Eyring, "Remembrance and Gratitude," *Ensign*, Nov 1989, 11.

11 Information about Koyle's youth comes from a Christianson interview with Ellen Rose Fillmore, younger sister of John Koyle, conducted in 1957, as well as his personal correspondence with Koyle's daughter, Eveline K. Stout, of Burley, Idaho. See Christianson, "Koyle Relief Mine," 16–18.

12 A testimony of the truth of the Mormon gospel, through the Holy Ghost, is an experience often called a "burning in the bosom." This phrase is from a passage in Doctrine and Covenants (D&C), a book of Joseph Smith's collected revelations and part of the Mormon canon: "Study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore you shall feel that it is right." D&C 9:8. See also Luke 24:32; and Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 785.

13 Kraut, *Relief Mine*, 27. This story also appears in Pierce, *Dream Mine Story*, 5, and Christianson, "Koyle Relief Mine," 47, who cites the personal memoir of C. F. Weight, a laborer at the mine.

red heifer[14] that had been lost about three weeks earlier. He had almost given up hope of finding the wayward bovine. In the dream, Koyle saw the heifer clearly, standing in a place he recognized, a far-off field below the Union Pacific railroad tracks. The cow faced east, with its right horn broken so that the point stuck into the creature's eye.[15]

Koyle remembered hearing a voice that asked:

> "If you find your cow at this place tomorrow, will you believe that the Restored [LDS] Gospel is true?"
> And unhesitatingly, John heard himself say "Yes, sir!"[16]

The next morning, Koyle rode out to the field below the railroad tracks, and as he had envisioned in his dream, there stood his red heifer, with the broken horn, looking at him, contentedly munching its cud.

Koyle could now claim his testimony. Not only did he believe that the LDS gospel was true, but that God worked through his dreams. Ogden Kraut concluded: "From such a simple but marvelous beginning John H. Koyle received a special spiritual gift . . . He also made a covenant with the Lord that if He would give him [such] dreams and visions, he would serve the Lord all the days of his life."[17]

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14 The "red heifer" carries biblical significance as part of a Judaic purification ritual in which a special cow is sacrificed and reduced to ashes, then used to cleanse anyone who has had contact with a corpse; Numbers 19:1–13. Certain modern millennialists believe that the discovery of a red heifer will precede the building of the third temple in Jerusalem (see, for example, Rivka Gonen, *Contested Holiness: Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Perspectives on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem* [Jersey City, NJ: KATV Publishing House, 2003], 160), but neither the Dream Mine chronicles nor the oral traditions make any mention of biblical connection.

15 Some believers say that Koyle had shown glimpses of his "dreaming" ability as a child; see Pierce, *Dream Mine Story*, 3, but most seem to agree that the "red heifer dream" is the first example of Koyle's gift of prophecy.

16 Pierce, *Dream Mine Story*, 2; despite his use of quotation marks, this is a re-creation Pierce first recorded in the 1930s, later included in his self-published history.

17 Kraut, *Relief Mine*, 28. Stockholder Mary H. Frandsen also recounted the story of the "Red Heifer Dream" in Mary H. Frandsen, interview by Janet W. Hales, winter 1974, Springville, Utah, interview no. BYU-110, transcript, Fife Folklore Archives, Special Collections and Archives, Utah State University Libraries,

That story both Pierce and Kraut tell of Koyle's prayer for a testimony recalls the first vision of Joseph Smith, a story Mormons know well. Smith's "glorious theophany" occurred in 1820, when Mormonism's founding prophet was fourteen years old and living with his family in the so-called burned-over district near Palmyra, New York. Confounded by the chaos of religious faiths, Smith sought to discover the one "true church." Smith knelt in a "sacred grove" and prayed and, according to his account, God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared in a pillar of light and instructed him to join none of the churches, for "all their creeds were an abomination."[18] For Dream Mine believers, the parallels were hard to resist. As a latter-day Joseph Smith, Koyle claimed a mantle of legitimacy that followers could understand and confirm.

Koyle's followers frequently measured their prophet against the founder of Mormonism. Norman Pierce unhesitatingly compared Koyle with Joseph Smith and believed that both were called to "establish the Church for the Millennium." Ogden Kraut described Koyle as a "man who knew and talked with Joseph Smith, the Prophet."[19] Such ideas persist today among believers like Fred Naisbitt, a stockholder from Ogden, Utah, some eighty miles north of the Dream Mine site, who declares fervently: "Koyle is second only to Joseph Smith in the number and accuracy of his prophecies."[20] Koyle has resonated with Joseph Smith over the years in a way that made the Dream Mine faithful hard to shake from their investment.

Buried Treasure: Moroni and the Founding of the Dream Mine

A few years after the magical dream that confirmed his Mormon faith, Koyle served an LDS mission to the American South.

Logan, Utah.

18 Joseph Smith Jr., "Joseph Smith—History," in The Pearl of Great Price (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1988), 1:19, [part of the Mormon canon, hereafter JS-H].

19 Pierce, *Dream Mine Story*, 69, and Kraut, *Relief Mine*, 178–79.

20 Fred Naisbitt, letter to author, June 7, 2007.

Historians know very little about Koyle's success as a missionary. He kept no diary, and the available sources make no mention of the converts he won. But a handful of mission-field legends helped establish Koyle's reputation as a visionary, including a story in which the dreamer saved the life of J. Golden Kimball, a future General Authority of the LDS Church.[21] For Dream Mine believers, the story offered more evidence that Koyle was among God's anointed and a vessel of divine purpose.[22]

In 1894, Koyle returned to Utah, his mission service complete. That same year, he reported his first revelation about the mine. On the night of August 27, 1894, he received a visitation from an "exalted personage from another world, who was attired in white and radiated intelligence."[23] Koyle claimed that the nighttime visitor was the Angel Moroni, the same heavenly messenger who had visited Joseph Smith and led him to unearth a set of ancient gold plates that would become the Book of Mormon. His appearance to Joseph Smith was regarded as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy from the book of Revelation: "I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth."[24] To Mormons, the Angel Moroni is the herald of the "fullness of the everlasting gospel." The angel's key role in the Dream

21 Kraut, *Relief Mine*, 33. The story about Koyle saving the life of the beloved J. Golden Kimball does not appear in any of the common sources on Kimball. For a version of the story, see also Graham, "Dream Mine," 234.

22 In addition to Pierce and Kraut, this view is expressed in various Internet newsgroup postings at Yahoo! Groups, "The-Dream-Mine: We Are Keeping the Dream Alive," http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The-Dream-Mine. See, for instance, message 12484.

23 Pierce, *Dream Mine Story*, 6.

24 Revelation 14:6 (New King James Version); for Mormon beliefs about Moroni, see McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 514; Terryl L. Givens, *By The Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 11–13, 79; and Quinn, *Early Mormonism*, chap. 5, which examines the importance of folk magic in the account of Joseph Smith's visitations by Moroni. According to Mormon belief, angels can be "preexistent spirits," "translated beings," or "resurrected personages" (among other types). In Mormon cosmology, other "resurrected" angels include John the Baptist, Peter, Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael: McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 35–36.

Mine narrative granted divine legitimacy to Koyle's excavation, and his imprimatur tied the Dream Mine to LDS founding miracles.[25]

Moroni rousted Koyle from his bed and led him into the chilly night and across a few miles of farmland to a mountain east of his home. With an "an eerie sort of corporeal disintegration,"[26] they passed directly into the mountain, where Koyle experienced a revelation of buried gold. Few of the Mormon faithful could miss the resonance with the origin story of their church. Koyle was surely following in Joseph Smith's footsteps.

Moroni showed Koyle a rich vein of gold within the mountain, which "would be the means of bringing much needed relief to the Lord's people."[27] Another 175 feet down, the angel led him into a cluster of nine enormous caverns hollowed into the heart of the mountain. Supported by massive pillars, the caverns contained uncounted piles of gold coins minted and buried by a group of Nephites, the refugee Hebrews whose story of New World exile is recounted in the Book of Mormon. Dream Miners believe that the Nephites buried a number of other precious items within the mountain caverns, including the Sword of Laban, a sacred weapon from the Book of Mormon; the Urim and Thummim, a pair of "seer stones" Joseph Smith reportedly used in his translation; and the actual gold plates. Because a large portion of the ancient record remained "sealed" by God and was never translated, Dream Miners believe that when they finally cut through the quartz and reach the treasure-filled caverns, they will reveal the full dimension of the LDS gospel.[28]

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25 Most Mormons would be quick to question the appearance of Moroni to anyone other than the head of the LDS Church, who is viewed as a genuine prophet of God and the sole authority able to receive divine revelation pertaining to the church's future and organization. See Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 120–122.

26 Zeese Papanikolas, *Trickster in the Land of Dreams* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 63.

27 Kraut, *Relief Mine*, 36.

28 Christianson cites a personal interview with Dr. Allen Brooksby in 1960, in which Brooksby, a mine assayer, offered his "firm belief" that one of the nine caverns beneath the Dream Mine contained the original gold plates; "Koyle Relief Mine," 16.

Punished for wickedness, those ancient Nephites found the caverns sealed against them. According to believers, God ordained that the treasures within, after lying untouched for centuries, would support his church and chosen people during the tribulations of the last days. The Angel Moroni told Koyle that God had chosen him to open the mine under the mountain, but warned that the gold would not "come in" and the Nephite treasure would remain buried until just before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, when wars, natural disasters, and the collapse of the American economy would create widespread suffering. Dream Mine gold would not only provide relief, but finance the gathering of Israel. One week following Moroni's visit, Koyle and a small group of credulous Utah County Mormons began digging.

In carefully constructing Koyle's history, believers Pierce and Kraut confirmed the divine mandate of the mine and further linked Koyle to Joseph Smith. When Moroni first appeared to Joseph Smith in 1823, the angel called the future prophet by name. Then, as Joseph Smith later recalled, the angel said "he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me, and that his name was Moroni; that God had a work for me to do . . . He said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent."[29] As Ogden Kraut recounted it, this same radiant being appeared to Koyle seventy-one years later: "A heavenly messenger came to his home to visit with him. John [Koyle] was informed that he had been chosen to perform a very special work . . . He was informed about an ancient civilization that once flourished on this continent."[30]

The similarities between the two stories reinforced the faith of believers, many of whom look to validate Koyle's prophetic credentials in comparison with Joseph Smith. According to one devout Dream Mine believer: "Bishop Koyle, next to the Prophet Joseph Smith, had more visits with [divine] messengers, including an ancient prophet [Moses] and a latter-day prophet, than any other of our day. He had a mission which compared to that of the Savior."[31]

29 JS-H 1:33.

30 Kraut, *Relief Mine*, 36.

31 L. DeLynn "Doc" Hansen, in a compilation of Dream Mine material as well as personal testimony, from "Doc's Dream Mine Book Compilation," an online

Like Joseph Smith, Koyle and his followers embraced what historian D. Michael Quinn called the "magic world view."[32] Divine messengers interceded in the material world to bring truth and salvation. Seer stones, ancient secrets on gold plates, and buried treasure were their means to open the eyes of man. And eyes certainly had to be open to what Mormons believed was the coming end of time. Mormons, if not unique, were particularly alert to such manifestations of the divine in their mortal world. At its heart, nineteenth-century Mormonism was a religion of eschatology. The church's founding in 1830 was for Mormons the first event in a divinely ordained sequence that signaled the last days as predicted by Old Testament prophets Daniel and Isaiah. Like its biblical ancestor, the restored camp of Israel embraced polygamy, revelation, prophetic authority, and temple worship. The one true church would herald the literal gathering of Israel in Jackson County, Missouri, and in defiance of the Antichrist, battle alongside Jesus to usher in the Millennium.[33]

With Smith's visions in mind, Pierce's and Kraut's narratives authenticated Koyle's venture by appropriating the objects and symbols of the Book of Mormon. The truth had been only partially revealed to Joseph Smith. Now, with the approach of the end times, Moroni had returned to complete his mission. According to Pierce, Koyle provided his followers with not only an essential task in the divine plan, but the means for the faithful to "survive the years of famine and distress while the Lord purges the earth in preparation for His Millennial Reign."[34] Building a stronghold at the foot of the golden mountain, they could shelter the gathering Israelites and provide "relief" until the return to Missouri and the establishment of Zion. Belief in such a divine mission was made secure when the details

document posted in http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The-Dream-Mine/files, 60.

32 Quinn, *Early Mormonism*, also examines the "religio-magical heritage" of early America in order to show that the folk magic traditions of the frontier were widespread; see especially chap. 1; also see Ronald W. Walker, "The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," *BYU Studies* 24 (Fall 1984): 429–59.

33 Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 3.

34 Pierce, *Dream Mine Story*, 64.

resonated with and reconfirmed early Mormon beliefs. For Norman Pierce, Ogden Kraut, and the other true believers in the mine, the stories of Smith and Koyle were so entwined that they could not be separated or denied.

Sharing the Dream: Koyle Goes Public

For a few years after Moroni's visit, Koyle's project remained little more than a small hole in the ground on the slope of the cone-shaped hill. With a crew of volunteers, mostly neighbors who believed in his prophetic abilities, the excavation went slowly. Digging began in September 1894, but the company was not incorporated for over a decade. Still, as word spread that the visionary Bishop Koyle had begun his treasure quest, people joined the movement, volunteering their time and labor to be a part of a project of holy possibilities.

When Koyle incorporated the Koyle Mining Company in March 1909, shares sold swiftly. The original stock-issue totaled 114,000 shares, of which all but 42,000 went to Koyle and five other company officers. For the most part, according to Norman Pierce, stockholders "represented the credulous but thrifty poor among the Mormons [who] desired to help others and be an instrument of great good among his fellowmen during a time of great distress."[35]

Unlike American speculators of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who unscrupulously sought fast riches in the burgeoning national economy, few stockholders in the Dream Mine looked for wealth. "The mine is not about gold," says current believer Kevin Kraut, son of Ogden Kraut. "It is not about making yourself rich; it is a means to an end, to provide help to the needy, and to help do the work of the Lord."[36] Stockholders are mining for gold, but they dig their treasure to perform the work of God.

While the Dream Mine attracted volunteer laborers and faithful investors, it also drew the attention of the LDS Church, worried that the faithful were being fleeced. In 1913, Mormon apostle James

35 Pierce, *Dream Mine Story*, 14–15.

36 Kevin Kraut, interview by author, November 18, 2007, Genola, Utah, tape recording.

E. Talmage, a trained geologist, examined a sample from the Dream Mine and declared the ore worthless. The First Presidency issued a statement in the *Deseret News* titled "A Warning Voice" that, while not mentioning Koyle or the Dream Mine, advised all Latter-day Saints against investing "in ventures of any kind on the specious claim of divine revelation or vision or dream . . . against mining schemes which have no warrant for success beyond the professed spiritual manifestations of their projectors, and the influence gained over the excited minds of their victims."[37] Five days after the "Warning," Koyle was removed as bishop of his Utah County congregation, which he had served for over five years. Ironically, Lars Olsen, who replaced him as bishop, was a dedicated follower of Koyle and a laborer at the mine. In 2007, Olsen's descendants still owned stock in the Dream Mine.[38]

To the mine's faithful, the Mormon Church's opposition reflected both fear and envy of Koyle's power. The authorities could sanction no revelation at the grass roots that had the potential to challenge their power or spark heresy. Koyle's followers personalized the dispute: "Bishop Koyle's prophecies and his dreams began to stir up new commotion and excitement, while faith in the spiritual powers of the Church president began to wane. This kind of embarrassment usually causes jealousy and anger," wrote Ogden Kraut.[39] If the church appeared united in public, there was some division in the ranks of the

37 "A Warning Voice," *Deseret News*, August 2, 1913. The original "First Presidency Message" was signed by LDS president Joseph F. Smith. It was reprinted as "A Renewed Warning to Members of the Church," *Deseret News*, December 29, 1945, signed by church president David O. McKay. For a thorough examination of the church's opposition to the mine between 1913 and Koyle's death in 1949, see Christianson, "Koyle Relief Mine," 21–30.

38 See Kraut, *Relief Mine*, 60; and Christianson, "Koyle Relief Mine," 35; also, a personal interview by the author with a descendant of Lars Olsen, Dec. 17, 2007.

39 Kraut, *Relief Mine*, 59. Both Kraut and Pierce discuss the specific visions, as do various personal interviews in Graham, "Dream Mine." The vision given the most weight is one in which Koyle predicted that a proposed LDS temple in Mexico would never open, counter to a public statement by President Joseph F. Smith. Koyle claimed he had been right when the Saints fled Mexico in 1912, and pointed to this as a source of "jealousy" among the First Presidency. See Fife, *Saints of Sage and Saddle*, 282, and Christianson, "Koyle Relief Mine," 57–58.

leadership. J. Golden Kimball was a stockholder and an LDS General Authority in the First Council of the Seventy, a governing body. Carter E. Grant, nephew of church president Heber J. Grant, also owned stock in Koyle's enterprise.[40]

Historian D. Michael Quinn reads the LDS Church's opposition to the Dream Mine as a rejection of the magical treasure quest that was fundamental to *early Mormonism* and a turning away from "superstitious and schismatic" practices that characterized the life of Joseph Smith. Quinn writes, "While a few Mormons continue to believe the folklore of the treasure trove . . . they do so in spite of the clearly stated opposition of the twentieth-century church."[41]

Yet, there was a larger ideological battle commencing that framed a more nuanced shift taking place within Mormonism. After 1890, the LDS Church began a gradual move toward the American religious mainstream. The Manifesto, church president Wilford Woodruff's public statement abandoning the practice of polygamy in order to conform to U.S. law, marked the beginning of this shift. Change then gained considerable momentum in the first decade of the twentieth century as the "Mormon Problem" took center stage in the U.S. Senate during the Smoot hearings, a well-publicized debate over the eligibility of Reed Smoot, a sitting LDS apostle, to retain his seat. The Smoot hearings again raised the issues of Mormon political control in Utah as well as lingering fears over the clandestine practice of post-Manifesto plural marriage. In exchange for "religious citizenship," which meant political recognition of Mormonism as a legitimate American denomination and the protection of its right to propagate its faith, the LDS Church refashioned itself into something more palatable to mainstream American sensibilities.[42]

This transformation was by no means smooth and linear, especially as it played out among Dream Mine believers. Even as LDS leaders

40 Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints*, 1890–1930 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986) describes the general authorities' investments in the Dream Mine, 296.

41 Quinn, *Early Mormonism*, 210–11.

42 Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), examines this transition.

issued their pronouncement against the unsanctioned supernatural events at the Dream Mine, some believers continued to be receptive to those same supernatural events and used them to reinforce their devotion to Koyle's vision.[43] Dream Mine faithful remained devoted to Joseph Smith as a man with a strong conviction in otherworldly power who lived in an intensely mystical world, and they viewed Koyle as cut from the same cloth. Meanwhile, LDS leaders began to refocus the history of Joseph Smith away from treasure hunting and folk magic, toward the church's founding miracle, Smith's "First Vision" and his corresponding "call" to restore Christ's one true gospel. This effort took shape most explicitly in the 1905 centennial celebration of Smith's birth, with the LDS Church erecting a granite monument at Smith's birthplace in Vermont. The monument sought to identify "what about his legacy mattered to the LDS Church," without offending the sensibilities of American Protestants. The First Vision became key and was further emphasized and popularized in the "Joseph Smith Story," Smith's canonized autobiography popular among LDS readers in the early 1900s.[44] This reshaping of Smith's story offered Pierce and Kraut a model from which to craft the story of the Dream Mine. They purposefully linked Koyle to Smith in a manner that stressed the legacy both men shared as key figures within God's plan.

At the same time that those broader forces were at play, LDS leaders gradually quieted their eschatological temper.[45] As the church made this shift, Dream Miners were marginalized and denied their role in the divine drama. In response, many of them held fast to their faith in the last days and reiterated their support for Koyle. As Kraut put it, "This opposition only proved to give new strength to the Bishop. It was clear that the Lord was sustaining him and his

43 Stock remained popular, despite the official word of "warning" from LDS leadership.

44 Flake, *American Religious Identity*, 110, 123.

45 Gordon Shepherd and Gary Shepherd, "Mormonism in Secular Society: Changing Patterns in Official Ecclesiastical Rhetoric," *Review of Religious Research* 26 (September 1984): 28–42. This study of Mormon general authorities' rhetoric at the church's biannual general conferences between 1850 and 1979, demonstrates that references to eschatology declined strikingly.

mission at the mine."[46] Yet, it would take more than faith in a man to sustain them as critical players in God's plan.

Church opposition and the threat of excommunication led Koyle to cease mining for nearly six years between 1914 and 1920. Still, Koyle's followers and investors remained dedicated to the cause, their faith shored up by a new millennial vision of the mine's destiny given to Koyle by two of the Book of Mormon's Three Nephites. They offered Koyle startling new revelations of an economic catastrophe awaiting the nation: a deflated dollar, rampant unemployment, and hunger, all triggers of the end.[47]

During the shutdown, believers preached Koyle's prophecies of the coming end times, and when the mine reopened in September 1920, work recommenced immediately. Believers pressed forward on the main shaft "as fast as miners with hand drills and powder could drive a tunnel into solid mountain rock."[48] As the excavation encountered the different geologic formations that Koyle had reportedly predicted, his prophetic reputation grew. Hundreds of people visited the mine to see firsthand the confirmation of prophecy. Many stayed to work on the mine, content to receive their pay in stock. Soon the main shaft had descended 2,200 feet. [49]

A Change in Focus: The Dream Mine and Economic Crisis

The momentum of Koyle's forecast of economic depression accelerated in June 1929. Koyle awoke one morning and predicted that in

46 Kraut, *Relief Mine*, 77.

47 Christianson, "Koyle Relief Mine," 42.

48 Pierce, *Dream Mine Story*, 33.

49 At the time it reopened, the Koyle Mining Company owed some $2,000 to the Spanish Fork Co-Op, which was a subsidiary of the LDS Church–owned Zion's Cooperative Mercantile Institution, and some have suggested the likelihood that church authorities softened their stand against the Dream Mine so the company could reopen and hopefully pay off its debts. See Christianson, "Koyle Relief Mine," 47–48. Even today, Koyle is affectionately referred to as the Bishop, even though he was removed from that position by the church just before the six-year shutdown.

four months—to the day—"Wall Street will crash . . . Thousands of people on every side will be going busted."[50] When the market plunged in October, the story quickly spread that Koyle had foretold the catastrophe. People gathered again at the Koyle farmstead not far from the mine to hear his predictions of the coming peril. He regularly updated his prophecies with new details from revelation received while asleep.

With renewed energy, in 1932 Koyle's followers supplied money and labor to build a state-of-the-art mill, sometimes called the "White Sentinel," near the mouth of the Dream Mine tunnel for Koyle's predicted outpouring of gold. As the return of Jesus neared, the Dream Mine reached its zenith. Dollars and workers flowed into the mine. The end times were at the door and the Dream Mine was about to "come in," believers said. "The money came in almost miraculously,"[51] remembered Pierce, who was at the Dream Mine when laborers began building the mill. With all indications seeming to point to the immediate fulfillment of Koyle's prophecies, stockholders "scraped the bottom of their Depression-worn pockets to raise the money needed to buy the equipment" that would refine the ore into the gold to finance the gathering of Israel.[52]

The giant mill never fulfilled the promise. Since it became operational in 1936, it has processed only one load of ore, netting the company $103.03. By 1937, the mill shut down, and in 2008 it stood on the mountain empty and quiet. But true believers are unshaken. In the words of Ogden Kraut: "When the Lord releases these riches, then the White Sentinel will become like an *ensign* to the nations for a place of relief."[53]

Koyle, who turned eighty in 1944, kept faith alive with a long list of prophecies. "Hardly a year passed without several new [dreams]

50 Christianson, "Koyle Relief Mine," 11, quoting the recollection of Carter Grant, from an interview in 1959.

51 Pierce, *Dream Mine Story*, 70.

52 Ibid., 66.

53 Kraut, *Relief Mine*, 141. Later, some stockholders alleged that the sample had been "spiked" to show artificially elevated levels of selenium in the ore, by an engineer eager to sell his equipment to the mine; see Pierce, *Dream Mine Story*, 73, and Christianson, "Koyle Relief Mine," 35.

being related, many of which saw rapid fulfillment," remembered Norman Pierce, who spent more and more time with Koyle as he grew older. Some of Koyle's prophecies failed, such as his prediction that Russian soldiers would soon overrun America. Believers still drew sustenance from other revelations, such as Koyle's forecast of Japanese surrender in 1945.[54]

Even as Koyle's reputation declined, the LDS Church reminded its flock that it would brook no challengers. Koyle was brought before a Mormon ecclesiastical court, where he was given a choice: issue a statement denying his revelations of the Dream Mine, or face excommunication. On January 8, 1947, the church-owned *Deseret News* carried his decision under the headline: "John H. Koyle Repudiates All Claims Regarding the Dream Mine." The newspaper reproduced a notarized statement bearing Koyle's signature, in which the old bishop sustained the LDS president and "appeal[ed] to all my followers to join with me in this repudiation of claims to divine guidance in connection with this mine."[55] But the matter would not close. Within days, Koyle repudiated the statement. He claimed that he had been forced to sign the declaration and swore that every prophecy was true.

Koyle was excommunicated on April 15, 1948. He died just over a year later, May 17, 1949, at the age of eighty-four. Ogden Kraut eulogized the man he considered a prophet: "Christ never saw the triumph of His Church while He lived; the Prophet Joseph Smith never saw the redemption of Zion while he was alive; and Bishop Koyle never realized the materialization of the ore deposited in that mountain. But in the Last Days they all shall see the fulfillment of their vision."[56] If LDS authorities believed that his death would close the mine, they were quickly disappointed. Even though no mining has occurred in decades, the dream continues.

54 Pierce, *Dream Mine Story*, 88.

55 "John H. Koyle Repudiates All Claims Regarding Dream Mine," *Deseret News*, January 8, 1948. Pierce calls this episode the "most difficult test of [Koyle's] lifetime, for he had often sincerely said that he valued his membership in the Church more than all the gold in the world," *Dream Mine Story*, 93.

56 Kraut, *Relief Mine*, 179.

Vindication Deferred: Modern Belief in the Dream Mine

As Koyle's contemporaries died, they passed their stock to a new generation of believers who could remember the bishop only in his later years, if at all. Today's stockholders know of the Dream Mine secondhand, through the yellowed stock certificates they inherited and the stories swapped among the old-timers of Utah County. Recently, the Internet has tightened the community of believers by fostering more frequent communication and interaction, supplementing the annual stockholders' meeting. Just as it always has, the Dream Mine attracts believers in an investment in the magical origins of their faith, and in a destiny that awaits ultimate fulfillment. While Koyle lived, it seemed that the moment was imminent. Signs pointed to the fast approach of the Last Days and the "coming in" of the mine. Yet every year, hope was deferred. In the six decades since Koyle's death, his followers have continued to read the signs around them, determined that prophecy was about to be fulfilled.

With Koyle dead, Dream Miners had lost the prophet who focused most intently on the end times. In his absence, they would find little spiritual support for eschatology in their mainstream Mormon ward houses, for the LDS Church had deemphasized such teaching. Mormon leaders, rather than looking to the end of the world, preached instead of the present and the need to shore up personal morality and build strong families.[57]

Dream Mine believers, however, could still embrace tightly their key roles in the end-time drama because they found encouragement in the religious great awakening that followed World War II. Christians, both fundamentalist and evangelical, saw signs that God had reentered history. The re-creation of the state of Israel in 1948, exactly one month after Koyle's excommunication, suggested that the prophetic clock had begun to tick again. "When are the times of the gentiles [non-Mormons] to be over?" asks one Dream Mine believer in the Internet group devoted to Koyle and the mine. "The scriptures tell

57 Gordon Shepherd and Gary Shepherd, "Mormonism in Secular Society," 35–36.

us that we can recognize it by the sign that the Jews will begin to gather in Israel. Is it just coincidence that 1948 brought about Koyle's ex[communication] at the same time that the Jews began to gather?"[58] Dream Mine believers would soon have more than enough divine signs to know that they were digging in the right spot.

In his study of twentieth-century eschatological belief, historian Paul Boyer visualized the various levels of commitment of end-time believers as concentric circles. At the core were devotees committed to preparing themselves and others for the apocalypse. A middle ring of believers were uncertain about precise doctrine but nevertheless maintained faith. An outer circle of secularists cared little about apocalyptic doctrine though they never completely escaped its influence.[59]

While the chapter and verse of Dream Mine eschatology differs from more broadly accepted Christian apocalyptic belief, the idea of concentric circles is a helpful way to visualize the faith of Dream Mine stockholders. Or, to use investment terminology, the concentric rings of Dream Mine faithfulness can be visualized as "buy," "hold," and "sell." The core, the "buy" group—which encompasses diverse kinds of Mormons—actively proselytizes the mine, disseminating Koyle's prophecies and participating in frequent online debates about when mining will begin again to usher in the Last Days. "Hold" group members are content to sit on their stock, many only vaguely aware of the Dream Mine narrative. The outer ring, the "sell" crowd, tends to contain people who inherited stock and do not hear the hoofbeats of the approaching apocalypse. While open to suggestion from true believers, they are typically ready to sell for the right price, often for $30 to $35 per share, sometimes for as much as $50.[60]

58 http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The-Dream-Mine/message/7686.

59 Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); he touches only briefly on LDS eschatology; see 288.

60 Members of the Dream Mine Internet group regularly post notices seeking stock, and, less regularly, offering it for sale. In August 2008, stock was advertised for $35 per share (see http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The-Dream-Mine/message/12891), while that same month a poster looking to buy offered to pay $50 (see http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The-Dream-Mine/message/12940).

At the core of the true believers is Doc Hansen, currently the Dream Mine's chief promoter. In his mid-fifties, Hansen is a devout member of the LDS Church who was raised in Utah County. As a boy, Hansen says, he was "fascinated" by the Dream Mine although he knew very little about it. "I saw the zig zag [of the road] going up the hill, and the big, white mill, and it always attracted me," Hansen remembers. Today a chiropractor whose Utah County office holds a bookshelf with dozens of titles about the Last Days by evangelical writers, Hansen finally decided to investigate when he was a high school senior. He found Norman Pierce's book in the public library and was convinced of the "truthfulness" of the narrative and Koyle's calling as a prophet. Although it would still be many years before he bought his first shares in the mine, Hansen was committed. "If you're meant to be connected with the project the spirit just grabs you and yanks you into the project," he says.[61]

The core group also includes Kevin Kraut, son of Dream Mine chronicler Ogden Kraut and an avowed "fundamentalist Mormon" with faith in principles such as plural marriage that have been long abandoned by the official church, which today excommunicates members who practice or espouse polygamy. Kraut, like other Dream Mine faithful, draws support for his Dream Mine belief from non-Mormon sources, including the prophetic utterances of an online evangelical group known as the "Prophecy Club,"[62] as well a former orthodox Jew who converted to Mormonism and wrote a number of books about the Last Days as foretold by the Old Testament's book of Isaiah.[63]

It is no surprise that Kraut and other Dream Mine believers find support for their faith in sources beyond a Mormon perspective. Evangelical Christians, in particular, possess an end-time vision that corresponds with the eschatological impulses of Dream Miners. Over the last third of the twentieth century and into the first decade

61 L. DeLynn "Doc" Hansen, interview by author, October 26, 2007, Orem, Utah.

62 The Prophecy Club, http://www.prophecyclub.com.

63 See, for instance, Avraham Gileadi, *Isaiah Decoded: Ascending the Ladder to Heaven* (Provo, UT: Hebraeus Press, 2002).

of the twenty-first century, American evangelicals produced countless books, recordings, pamphlets, videos, and websites designed to track the world's relentless march toward Armageddon.[64] Informed primarily by the book of Revelation, evangelical Christians look for the predicted signposts along the way. Some have already occurred, such as the creation of Israel and the return of Jerusalem. Other events await fulfillment: the rise of an Antichrist, the establishment of a sinister "new world order," an unlocking of secrets hidden with the Old Testament, as well as wars, plagues, and natural disasters like earthquakes and floods of growing intensity. The evangelical scenario of the Last Days complements the eschatological vision of the Dream Mine faithful, with one key exception. Many evangelical Christians believe in the rapture, when God will lift deserving Christians to heaven and save them from the trials of the Last Days. Neither Dream Miners, nor Mormons in general, place their faith in the rapture.

Among Dream Miners, the members of the core "buy" group share one important attribute; they believe with certainty in the ultimate fulfillment of Koyle's many prophecies and frequently see signs of their imminence. Like twentieth-century evangelical Christians, Dream Miners look to the biblical preaching of Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Daniel, and the New Testament book of Revelation, to inform their eschatological worldview. They point to Israel's capture of the Old City of Jerusalem in 1967 as confirmation of biblical prophecy. They also quickly note that Joseph Smith predicted this event and understood its significance. Like evangelical Protestants, the Dream Mine core believers anticipate the rise of an Antichrist and see evidence of his pending ascent in assorted worldwide conspiracies and cabals. "The destruction and fiasco will begin [with] the full mobilization of the New World Order . . . the Antichrist is closely following," predicts one dedicated stockholder in a September 2004 Internet posting, which adds: "The Bible details horrible judgments and plagues,

64 A seminal text on biblical prophecy from an evangelical Christian perspective is Hal Lindsey, with C. C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), which sold over 35 million copies and spawned a billion dollar end-times industry.

famines, earthquakes, wars, water contamination and much more" before the mine reopens.[65]

In the twenty-first century, devout Dream Miners connect in cyberspace, exchanging prophecies and opinions via an Internet group on the Yahoo! network titled "The Dream Mine: We Are Keeping the Dream Alive." It was Doc Hansen who first purchased stock in the mine in the 1980s and founded the e-group on Sept. 10, 2001, the eve of the terror attacks in New York City and Washington DC. Though reluctant to attribute this timing to divine guidance, Hansen says: "It was the night before 9/11, and I got the distinct impression [to found the e-group] and when I get those distinct impressions, I don't question it, I just do it . . . It was meant to be, and as a result believers came out of the woodwork." In its first seven years, the e-group has attracted close to 1,000 members and received over 12,900 distinct posts. "I had about twenty people join right away, and it kept growing faster," Hansen remembers. "I have people e-mail me privately to say, 'I was led to this.' People have dreams that lead them to this group."[66]

Although posters to the group are cyber-anonymous, their messages offer insight into the perspectives of current Dream Mine movement members. Many posts scrutinize Koyle's prophecies in the light of current world events—wars, famines, earthquakes, and other disasters. Conflict between Russia and Turkey was one of his predictions. Eager for the end of time, a 2007 e-group poster declared: "Keep an eye on Turkey. Some interesting things are going on over there now . . . Climate Changes, Volcanoes, Current Events . . . Preparedness

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65 http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The-Dream-Mine/message/6748. For Joseph Smith's prophecy that "Jerusalem must be rebuilt," see Underwood, *Early Mormonism*, 121, and Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 180. Modern Dream Mine believer Kevin Kraut says that the Israeli presence in Jerusalem is "a step toward the fulfillment of all [Koyle's] prophecies"; Kevin Kraut, interview by author, November 18, 2007, Genola, Utah.

66 L. DeLynn "Doc" Hansen, interview by author, October 26, 2007, Orem, Utah.

is a lot like Insurance; you have to have it before it is needed."[67] Koyle had said that war will rage on the coastline of America, and an army of one hundred thousand Russians will invade North America through Canada. In the Middle East, America's armies will falter. A worldwide famine will send prices skyrocketing for basic staples like rice and wheat.[68]

Postings on the Dream Mine e-group tempt believers with the recurring certainty that the end is at hand. "The mine will open up in the fall season," wrote one poster confidently in October, 2001. "Will it be this fall after an economic collapse? Who knows? It has been a long hot summer. :-) Who has a farmer's almanac? What is this winter supposed to be like?"[69] That post was challenged by another core believer, who wrote simply: "The mine can't open yet. Not for 2–4 years. The parameters don't fit yet."[70] Within two days, the initial post had generated a dozen responses, a cyber-argument about the merits of the original premise: that the mine would "come in" immediately. Once a thread ends, another posting will reinvigorate the cyberspace conversation. A reading of a new sign—an earthquake, rising gasoline prices, a falling dollar, the increased value of gold—compels the Dream Miners to speculate whether Koyle's prophecies line up with the latest hints that the time is now. The true believers are flush with anticipation. As one asked in an April 2008 message to the group:

> Is THIS the year? We are VERY close to the mine becoming active, and I think that Utah will be where the New Economy begins, and that the Dream Mine will help to bring back America from the brink of absolute economic devastation . . . Thank God I live in Utah, and near the mine.[71]

Posts to the e-group also dissect biblical revelations: "One of the strange enigmas of the world is the total ignoring of Bible prophecy as it comes true with complete accuracy," notes a 2003 message posted

67 http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The-Dream-Mine/message/11841.

68 Kraut, *Relief Mine*, 190–91.

69 http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The-Dream-Mine/message/283.

70 http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The-Dream-Mine/message/294.

71 http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The-Dream-Mine/message/12778.

less than a month after the United States launched its invasion of Iraq. "As one studies the news headlines and reads the various accounts about what is being said in Washington, it becomes clear that the Bible prophet Habakkuk's vision of America invading the Middle East and taking it for itself draws closer by the day." The post recommends a video that makes the case, called *The American-Babylon Connection*, that "will prove to you that America is Babylon and shows you in great detail why this is so. It is all happening right under your nose."[72]

Core-group Dream Miners, like evangelicals, seek to "decode" the mysteries of the Bible to confirm their beliefs. Bible codes that search for esoteric information and secret prophecies allegedly encrypted within the text of the Old Testament have a long history. They grew in popularity during the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century. Dozens of popular books on the subject by evangelical Christians have appeared and include such titles as *Bible Code Bombshell: Compelling Scientific Evidence That God Authored the Bible* (2005); *The Original Code in the Bible: Using Science and Mathematics to Reveal God's Fingerprints* (1998); and *Future Prospects of the World According to the Bible Code* (2002).[73] In posts to the Dream Mine e-group, believers repeatedly dissect these codes to reveal a hidden story soon to unfold, confirming their beliefs. "The Bible codes seem to indicate that there will be an economic collapse between October of 2005 [and] October of 2006," writes one Dream Mine believer in January of 2005. They also look to Bible codes to validate Koyle, as in a 2004 post by Doc Hansen, which claimed that Hebrew scholars had examined the Bible, "plugged in everything about Koyle," and found hidden messages that predicted the founding of the Dream Mine and confirming its divinely sanctioned role in the end times.[74]

72 http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The-Dream-Mine/message/2683.

73 Edwin Sherman, *Bible Code Bombshell: Compelling Scientific Evidence That God Authored the Bible* (Los Angeles: New Leaf Publishing Group, 2005); Del Washburn, *The Original Code in the Bible: Using Science and Mathematics to Reveal God's Fingerprints* (New York: Madison Books, 1998); and Joseph Noah, *Future Prospects of the World According to the Bible Code* (Boca Raton, FL: New Paradigm Books, 2002).

74 http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The-Dream-Mine/message/7664; and http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The-Dream-Mine/message/6764.

The Dream Mine scenario, if paralleling the beliefs of evangelical Christians, has a distinct latter-day theme and bears Koyle's and Mormonism's imprint. The view from Utah County predicts that before the mine reopens, the American dollar will become "worthless" and the federal government will collapse. The LDS Church will be "set in order," an enigmatic phrase about which believers regularly deliberate. An especially difficult winter will afflict Utah County in the year the mine comes in, followed by spring flooding and a dry, scorching summer. With the area's weather remarkably consistent with this pattern, Dream Miners are always ready to predict that the mine is about to come in. Geneva Steel, a manufacturing plant in Utah County, will close down, something that happened in 2001.

Clearly, the Dream Miners are busy not only interpreting the signs but sharing knowledge and building the community that will collectively bring in the mine. In addition, messages on the e-group announce the monthly weekend work projects at the mine, in which stockholders gather to make minor improvements to the property in anticipation of the day when the mining work will resume. Furthermore, the e-group regularly receives messages updating the price of gold and offering advice on how to survive the coming trials. It also facilitates stock exchange between members of the "sell" group and the "buy" group.

The core Dream Mine community tolerates difference among its members. They are invariably Mormon, although the character of Mormon beliefs ranges widely. There are "orthodox" or "mainstream" LDS who adhere to the teaching of church authorities in Salt Lake City, along with so-called "fundamentalist Mormons," people who are no longer members of the mainstream LDS Church largely because they espouse practices such as polygamy that were part of *early Mormonism* but were jettisoned as the faith evolved beyond its nineteenth-century origins. Similarly, "lapsed" Mormons of various stripes are welcome in the community.

Still, depending on the nature of their Mormon belief, core believers use the Dream Mine narrative in different ways. Mormon fundamentalists, who are at odds doctrinally with the LDS hierarchy, emphasize the story of church opposition to Koyle as evidence

of official error and unworthiness. For faithful members of the LDS Church, the opposition of authorities in Salt Lake City and especially Koyle's excommunication pose problems. Some reconcile the dissonance by contending that the excommunication never actually occurred.[75] Others maintain that Koyle was posthumously reinstated into the church.[76] Still others argue that Koyle, before his death, received a "second anointing"—a little-known temple ceremony that believers say is reserved for those Mormons who have been guaranteed entry into the highest level of heaven and have the favor of God.[77]

The middle group—the "hold" group—includes mainly mainstream Mormons who possess stock as a statement of belief, but do not have the sense of fervor and certainty exhibited in the core group. "We still have some stock; we just don't think all that much about it," says Mark Koyle, a great-great-grandson of the mine's founding prophet. "If [the prophecies] are [proven] true someday, then I guess we'll think about it then."[78]

Some officers of the Relief Mine board of directors, despite their authority over the day-to-day function of the business operation, fall into the "hold" category. Boyd Warren is a board member who owns stock and meets monthly with other officers of the mine, but does not insist on the "literal acceptance of everything [Koyle] said . . . I might be willing to believe in it, but I don't want to say any more than that." Warren adds that he views the coregroup of believers as "generally a bunch of kooks."[79] Warren considers the Relief Mine Company a business with a colorful history, not a spiritual endeavor. He will not comment about his faith in Koyle's prophecies.

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75 http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The-Dream-Mine/message/11058.

76 http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The-Dream-Mine/message/11056.

77 http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The-Dream-Mine/message/349; Kraut, *Relief Mine*, 182. For more about the second anointing, see David John Buerger, "'The Fulness of the Priesthood': The Second Anointing in Latter-day Saint Theology and Practice." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16 (Spring 1983): 10–44; also, Brooke, *Refiner's Fire,* 245.

78 Mark Koyle, telephone conversation with author, Nov. 8, 2007.

79 Boyd Warren, telephone conversation with author, Nov. 9, 2007.

Other stockholders who fall into the middle ring are more willing to discuss the Dream Mine. Often, these moderate Dream Miners urge their more ardent counterparts to restrain their fervor with a dose of mainstream Mormonism. "[Koyle] would be quite upset and disappointed to know that there are people that profess a desire to be a part of the Dream Mine, but do not follow the [LDS] Prophet," writes a middle-ring stockholder in a 2007 post to the e-group. "He does not want to be treated as a prophet. He wants to be treated as a man who was blessed with inspiration for his stewardships. His council [*sic*] to his family was to always remain faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which means following the Prophet."[80]

Another post asks for a critical examination of Koyle's prophetic abilities and the Dream Mine's destiny: "There is nothing wrong with [q]uestioning. In fact, those who don't are the ones who will never understand completely what the principles are, nor how they work. I think that one must have a curious mind and an open mind for the spirit within to be able to work and grow to its fullest. I also don't feel the conflict between the mine and the church should cause a conflict within one's mind and nature as long as one or the other don't [*sic*] become fanatic in nature."[81]

Beverly Kingsford, a stockholder and sometime e-group poster, reflects the ambivalence of this group's members and the conflict they feel. A devout Mormon from Utah County who backed the libertarian-minded Ron Paul in the 2008 Republican presidential primary, Kingsford first learned about the Dream Mine from Hansen during a chiropractic session. "Frankly, I thought it sounded quite strange, but I was curious," Kingsford remembers. "I read what [Hansen] gave me, and I couldn't put it down. I felt like it had to be true. There were too many things—miracles—that happened to Bishop Koyle and the early miners to believe it was all some man-made thing."[82] After praying for spiritual confirmation of the mine's place in the divine plan, Kingsford received personal testimony of its truthfulness and purchased $5,000

80 http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The-Dream-Mine/message/11860.

81 http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The-Dream-Mine/message/11865.

82 Beverly Kingsford, letter to author, Nov. 28, 2007.

worth of stock. She hopes for a chance to purchase more before the Last Days arrive.

Kingsford, like the other middle-group Dream Mine believers, finds evidence in Koyle's story that gives her a stronger testimony of her Mormon faith. Still, her conflict is apparent, as she writes:

> The one thing that is very hard to accept about the *dream mine story*, is that Bishop Koyle prophecies [sic] that one day the church will be set in order. Now, that means that the leadership at that time will be out of order somehow and the church in general will not be as it should be. Now this is a real test for those of us who are active in the church and want to stay that way [but] I do believe that the mine will eventually bring forth gold and I have [purchased] stock in it and I will buy more if I can. To be a Dream mine believer, you have to believe that these things are going to come to pass and that God will protect His people when the terrible things start happening. I believe that we are very close.[83]

If middle-group members are in denial or conflicted, this cannot be said about members of the outer circle of Dream Mine stockholders. The "sell" group shares a general disbelief in Koyle's prophetic ability and shows a lack of interest in the Dream Mine narrative. One member of the outer ring of stockholders is Juanita Perry, an eighty-three-year-old woman from West Valley City, Utah, about fifty miles north of the Dream Mine. Perry recently sold two hundred shares of stock to a member of the e-group for $30 a share. A lifelong member of the LDS Church, Perry describes herself as a devout Mormon who is active in her ward, or congregation. In the 1930s, she and her husband lived in Utah County, and in the midst of the Great Depression he began working for Koyle in his spare time, helping to build the processing mill on the mountainside and accepting Dream Mine stock in lieu of pay. Over time, Perry's husband became convinced that the mine was on the verge of coming in. "He was a real thinker," Perry recalls of her husband. "He was very interested in history, and the more he got to know the story, the more he believed in it. He really had a strong testimony in the whole [Dream Mine] thing." When

83 Ibid.

Perry's husband died in 2007, he bequeathed his two hundred shares of stock to the couple's three adult children. "They never really understood what it was all about, and they really never saw any truth to it," Perry says, explaining her family's decision to sell.[84]

Members of the "sell" group typically do not know much about Koyle or his Dream Mine. Secure in their Mormonism, these "sellers" see nothing in the Dream Mine narrative worth excavating. Still, members of the outer ring occasionally use the e-group to chide true believers, as in this 2001 post from a doubter whom Hansen, the group's founder, was trying to convince of the mine's divine importance:

> Doc [Hansen] must have put me on this list because I am a skeptic, just so's [sic] everyone could have one heckler in the group to keep things buzzing . . . Why not spend the money people are spending on stocks, to buy up food right now? Grain is cheap now, but in panic and shortages, no amount of gold will buy it. In food shortages, no one will sell it to anyone with any amount of gold . . . I've read the Ogden Kraut book [about the Dream Mine], and I say he was a good man, but I think he was off, on this one . . . Sign me 'still skeptical' Jeanette.[85]

Other members of the outer ring care little about the faith of true believers, and use the e-group to profit from the urgency felt within the core group. Yet, even with sellers often making more than $40 per share for their yellowing family heirlooms, the core group of buyers is not resentful. In fact, core believers often express a sense of superiority toward the sellers, rueful about the denial of their prophet. "I feel sorry for the people who are selling all of their shares," writes one 2008 poster to the e-group. "Some of them even had their shares given to them, rather than having to struggle and go without in order to afford to buy them. How sorry they will be someday when they realize what their lack of faith, vision and wisdom has cost them."[86]

Faith such as this is certain to keep Koyle's dream alive long into the future. As signs appear that seem to confirm to believers the

84 Juanita Perry, telephone conversation with author, May 17, 2007.

85 http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The-Dream-Mine/message/28.

86 http://groups.yahoo.com/group/The-Dream-Mine/message/12640.

approach of the apocalypse and the accuracy of Koyle's prophetic gift, Dream Miners will continue their treasure quest. The Dream Mine stock market will not close as long as the miners dream that the enterprise is the sole chance to save a people, a faith, and a nation.

Conclusion: The Persistence of Belief

In digging the mine, dreamers found an earthly kinship and a divine calling. The Dream Mine, steeped in Mormon history, myths, and symbols, offered shelter to a wide spectrum of believers. By reading a book, purchasing stock, or clicking a mouse, they became participants in a divine drama that united the Kingdom of God to Utah County. With their eyes on Joseph Smith, they accepted Bishop Koyle's call to live their faith and save the world. Curiously, they took the leap of faith as Mormons by embracing the fervent eschatology of modern-day Christian evangelicals. In this, they felt closer to the roots of Mormonism, a return to the true gospel. Unlike their evangelical counterparts, who will ascend to heaven during the rapture, Dream Mine believers expect to be fully engaged in end-time tribulations and working to fulfill God's purpose. Dream Miners keep one foot in the sacred past. With its roots in the supernatural traditions that all Mormons share, its rich lode of collective Mormon folklore, and a fate linked directly to the eschatological precepts of the early LDS Church, the Dream Mine has an appeal that is accessible to a variety of believers who share a common set of fundamental Mormon values. If some abandon modern Mormonism on this journey, others ignore the dissonance in their minds to hold fast to official authority and their shares of stock. The *Dream Mine story*, in the minds of believers, does not contradict their Mormon faith. It augments it. The Dream Mine narrative attracts believers because, like the jagged, rocky paths that crisscross the hills around the excavation, it offers them traction within their larger Mormon faith. Koyle's story and the destiny of his mine lure hundreds of Mormons who make up a dynamic community of faith set within, and at times against, the larger hierarchical church. For Koyle's believers, the mine provides a subterranean passageway to the world of Mormon roots and

a portal to the divine drama of end time for which God established the Mormon Church.

Today, housing subdivisions sprout like wild mushrooms in the wide-open tracts of land beneath the Dream Mine, which were farms in John Koyle's day. Newcomers look up at the cone-shaped mountain to the east and wonder about the odd-looking derelict building that sprawls within a cleft in the rocky mountainside. But for Dream Miners, the truth always lay beneath the surface. They recall that in the days just before John Koyle died, before the cessation of digging, and after his excommunication, the old bishop made one final hike up Dream Mountain. On the site of the mine, squinting out over the fields where he had spent most of his life, he experienced a last vision.

He saw a "small rift in the dark clouds revealing a little spot of blue." Then, as he watched, this spot of blue expanded, the skies opened, and "the mine and its surroundings were restored to the brilliant sunshine of a fine glorious day with all oppressiveness having vanished away."[87] True believers are certain that this final vision was God's promise to Koyle that his life was not in vain, nor would their lives be so. They remain, as Koyle's faithful follower Norman Pierce declared, "prepared, mentally and spiritually, to be steadfast in watching and waiting for a glorious vindication that they know will come."[88] Only death will shake them from their commitment.

87 Pierce, *Dream Mine Story*, 52.

88 Ibid., 102.

7

A Nessie in Mormon Country

Alan L. Morrell

In the August 3, 1868, edition of the *Deseret Evening News*, the Bear Lake Valley correspondent Joseph C. Rich noted:

> All lakes, caves and dens have their legendary histories. Tradition loves to throw her magic wand over beautiful dells and lakes and people them with fairies, giants and monsters of various kinds. Bear Lake has also its monster tale to tell, and when I have told it, I will leave you to judge whether or not its merits are merely traditionary.[1]

The twenty-seven-year-old son of Mormon apostle Charles C. Rich further explained that the local Indians believed in a "monster animal" that had been known to capture and carry away individuals who swam in the lake. Although the Indians had not seen the monster in several years, they described it as being serpentine with legs about eighteen inches long, which allowed it to crawl short distances on the shore.

In the five years since the Mormons had settled the valley, several persons had reported seeing a "huge animal of some kind that they could not describe." Since the observers had no corroborating witnesses, the reports were easily dismissed. Three weeks before Rich's

1 "Correspondence: Monsters of Bear Lake," *Deseret Evening News*, August 3, 1868. For additional context on Bear Lake Monster lore, see Bonnie Thompson, *Folklore in the Bear Lake Valley* (Salt Lake City: Granite Publishing, 1972), chap. 2.

article, S. M. Johnson of South Eden was riding near the lake when he saw what he thought was a drowned person. As he got closer, he realized the body was in fact an animal, which raised its head two or three feet out of the water. Because it did not drift onto shore with the waves, he concluded that its large body must have rested on the lake floor.

The next day, a man and three women saw a large animal of the "monster kind" swimming "faster than a horse could run on land." These two independent reports revived the monster question, and several who had earlier seen the purported leviathan once again brought forward their claims. A short time later, N. C. Davis and Allen Davis of St. Charles, Idaho, and Thomas Slight, J. Collins, and six women of Paris, Idaho, saw the creature. Slight said that he distinctly saw its sides and supposed it was not less than ninety feet in length. N. C. Davis could not be certain of its length but said that it traveled faster than any locomotive that he had ever seen. Judging by the waves and wake that it created, he estimated it was of a significant size. This final sighting also confirmed that there was more than one mysterious beast in the lake. According to the witnesses, six smaller creatures, each about the size of a horse, followed in the wake of the larger.

Joseph Rich explained to the readers of the *Deseret Evening News* that Davis and Slight were "prominent men, well known in this country, and all of them are reliable persons whose veracity is undoubted. I have no doubt they would be willing to make affidavits to their statement." He concluded by stating,

> There you have the monster story so far as completed, but I hope it will be concluded by the capture of one sometime . . . Is it fish, flesh or serpent, amphibious and fabulous or a great big fish, or what is it? Give it up but have hopes of someday seeing it, if it really exists, and I have no reason to doubt the above statements.

Rich's well-placed father added a postscript to the article, stating, "I have talked with some of the parties in relation to the monster story, and it is as Joseph has stated." The senior Rich's apostolic stamp of approval no doubt carried great weight in the Latter-day Saint community.[2]

2 Ibid.

The article was very convincing. Joseph Rich did not claim to have seen the monsters but was simply reporting the stories as they had been told him. Furthermore, the testimonies were from several highly respected individuals in the community. Although Apostle Rich had not confirmed the existence of the creature, he had nonetheless verified that the reporting itself was accurate. To the casual reader, it would seem probable that some unusual phenomena were occurring in Bear Lake.

The article created quite the stir in Salt Lake City. Three days after Rich's report, an editor for the *Deseret Evening News* wrote:

> EXCITED—Various and sundry parties . . . are manifesting a degree of excitement, altogether unwarranted under the circumstances, concerning the description of the Bear Lake Monster by our esteemed friend, J. C. R. and endorsed by Pres. C. C. Rich . . . We sustain the tangibility and reality of those mysterious denizens of Bear Lake.[3]

Enthusiasm for the sightings was growing and now begged the judgment of the Latter-day Saint leadership.

At a regional church gathering (a "stake" conference) in Logan a couple of weeks after the initial report, several leaders from Salt Lake City spoke firsthand with residents of Bear Lake. They reported that they had "had conversation with brother Charles C. Rich and other brethren from Bear Lake Valley, respecting the monsters which have been seen in the lake" and that they all believed the account as published. They considered the testimony that had been given "by so many individuals, who have seen these creatures in so many places and under a variety of circumstances, indisputable."[4] The reporter concluded:

> Our readers who are familiar with the accounts we have published of these creatures, can form their own conclusion respecting them. The accounts are fishy, decidedly so; but we cannot dispute the persons who make them. Some of the persons who have seen them we know, and their truthfulness is unquestionable. We must believe they saw something remarkable, whether monsters or not we hope time will soon decide.[5]

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3 "Local and Other Matters," *Deseret Evening News*, August 6, 1868.

4 *The Latter-day Saints Millennial Star*, October 10, 1868, 642.

5 Ibid.

Taking exception to the dubious characterization of the monster, Rich penned a defensive letter to the *Deseret Evening News* stating that

> I noticed with feelings of profound regret that there existed in Utah certain persons disposed to doubt the veracity of the published account regarding the monsters of Bear Lake. I supposed the mere fact of the appearance of my initials to any communication or statement, however incredible apparently, would have rendered its authenticity indisputable.

He further explained that he felt bad for the unfortunate person who might come up to Bear Lake and be "gobbled up by the 'Water Devil'" while out for a swim. This correspondence included even more sightings of the monster and several plans of how the local residents were going to catch one of them.[6]

Over the next three years, several articles dealing with the Bear Lake Monster, and other monsters, appeared in local papers. A few of the highlights from those years include the sighting of serpentlike monsters in Utah Lake described as having a head shaped like a large greyhound, with the "wickedest black eyes" that the witness had ever seen.[7] One writer noted that based on witness testimony, he was certain that the monsters were nothing more than members of the seal family who had been trapped in Bear Lake when the waterways that had once connected it to the ocean receded.[8] In July of 1871, the *Salt Lake Herald* cited the *Corinne Journal* in announcing that one of the monsters had been captured. It was reported to have been about twenty feet in length and to have possessed "a mouth sufficiently large to swallow a man without any difficulty."[9] Sightings of monsters in the confluences of the Bear and Weber rivers and in the Great Salt Lake led several locals to wonder if some great underground channel connected those waters to Bear Lake. The *Daily Corinne Reporter* claimed that Brigham Young actively preached this channel theory, although some critics of the Mormon "prophet" wondered if he had concocted

6 "Correspondence," *Deseret Evening News*, September 25, 1868.

7 "Brigham Young's Trip North," *Deseret Evening News*, August 27, 1868.

8 "Bear Lake Monsters," *Deseret Evening News*, March 29, 1870.

9 "Monster Captured," *Salt Lake Herald*, July 9, 1871.

the whole affair so he could steal cattle and blame the monsters for their disappearances.[10]

While Young's teachings about subterranean waterways cannot be confirmed, there is evidence that he had a personal interest in the Bear Lake Monster. In the summer of 1869, the *New York Times* reported an interview with Brigham Young Jr. in which he stated that his father was going to investigate the claims to determine whether the story was "an honest tale of a serpent, or only a fish story."[11] Supporting this claim is a letter to the *Deseret Evening News* from Brigham Young and his traveling party, which mentioned that they stopped at Bear Lake to see if they could spot the elusive creature.[12] In his personal correspondence with church leader David P. Kimball of Paris, Idaho, Young mentioned sending a large rope to the local community to aid in capturing the monster.[13] The anti-Mormon newspaper *Daily Corinne Reporter* also noted that Brigham Young mentioned the existence of the monsters in his sermons.[14]

Perhaps even more interesting was the apparent sighting of the monster by church apostles John Taylor, George Q. Cannon, Wilford Woodruff, Lorenzo Snow, Franklin D. Richards, John H. Smith, and Joseph F. Smith. They reported in the *Deseret Evening News* that "while on the way from Fish Haven, a number of the party saw what they supposed was the celebrated Bear Lake monster. It was described as a large undulating body, with about 30 feet of exposed surface, of a light cream color, moving swiftly through the water, at a distance of three miles from the point of observation." While never declaring the watery beast to be legitimate, church leaders nonetheless seemed as fascinated with the monster as the general membership.[15]

In spite of initial interest, enthusiasm for the Bear Lake Monster eventually declined. The lack of new sightings and the subsequent

10 *Daily Corinne Reporter*, May 20, 1871.

11 "The Mormons," *New York Times*, August 31, 1869.

12 "Editorial Correspondence," *Deseret Evening News*, June 23, 1869.

13 Brigham Young to David P. Kimball, February 23, 1871, Brigham Young Office Files, Church History Library.

14 *Daily Corinne Reporter*, May 20, 1871.

15 "President Taylor's Tour," *Deseret Evening News*, August 17, 1881.

silence of Mormon authorities on the topic helped the phenomenon fade from public memory. Unlike many supernatural mysteries, however, the Bear Lake Monster has an explanation. Twenty-six years following his provocative allegations, Joseph Rich finally admitted that it had all been a "wonderful first class lie."[16] A closer look at Joseph Rich's life demonstrates that he was, in fact, a prankster at heart. Even at his funeral, his close friend and apparent co-conspirator, Thomas Slight, stated that Rich would be well remembered for his joking.[17]

Perhaps Rich's greatest lark was his "prophesying hen." Joseph Rich was a leading merchant in the Bear Lake Valley and owned the area's first store. Among the local products that he sold were the unusually large brown eggs of Mrs. Clifton's Plymouth Rock hen. One day, mysterious messages began appearing on the shells. A consummate showman, Rich drew large crowds to the store where he dipped the eggs in a special solution to reveal their otherworldly messages. Scriptures, philosophy, and personal advice all materialized for the local Saints. Eventually, prophecies of future events started to appear, generating a great deal of excitement in the community. Perhaps tiring of his son's mischief, Apostle Charles C. Rich declared at a public gathering that when the Lord wanted something revealed he would do it by way of proper authority and not through the hind end of a chicken. Soon after, Joseph Rich put away his invisible ink.[18]

In spite of Rich's hoax, Mormon belief in the Bear Lake Monster opens a window on a world where the nascent sciences vied for supremacy with less critical views of the universe. It was a world where new wonders and ideas appeared alongside frauds, hoaxes, and humbugs. It was a world that was, perhaps, best symbolized by the lifework of Brigham Young's contemporary, P. T. Barnum.

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16 "Joseph C. Rich Addresses the People of Bear Lake Valley," Joseph Coulson Rich Collection, *Church History* Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, hereafter cited as Church History Library.

17 "Funeral Services Held Over the Remains of the Hon. Joseph C. Rich in the Stake Tabernacle at Paris, on Wednesday Afternoon, October 21, 1908," Joseph Coulson Rich Collection, Church History Library.

18 Leonard Arrington, *Charles C. Rich: Mormon General and Western Frontiersman* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), 314.

One of the reasons for the wild success of Barnum's notorious American Museum in New York City was the blossoming popularity of natural history in the Victorian world. People of all classes were busy collecting specimens, attending museums, and reading the latest travel adventures of daring explorers. As one observer pointed out,

> by the middle of the century there was hardly a middle-class drawing room in the country [in this case, England] that did not contain an aquarium, a fern-case, a butterfly cabinet, a seaweed album, a shell collection, or some other evidence of a taste for natural history, and at the same time it was impossible to visit the seaside without tripping over parties of earnest ladies and gentlemen, armed with a book by Mr. Gosse and a collection of jam jars.[19]

British imperialism brought with it "discoveries" from the newly conquered lands. In 1770, a British sea captain noticed an animal off the northeastern coast of Australia that was "as large as a grey hound, of a mouse color, and very swift." It was later observed that it had a long tail and jumped like a hare or a deer. One of the crew finally shot one of these curious animals, and upon examination, it was determined that they had never seen an animal quite like it.[20] Throughout the nineteenth century, several "new" animals joined the kangaroo. In 1861, just seven years before Joseph Rich wrote about the Bear Lake Monster, explorers discovered an animal whose existence had been long rumored but never substantiated—the gorilla.[21] Other discoveries in the natural world continued throughout the century.

Barnum's museum exhibited numerous animals from abroad, including lions, tigers, ostriches, elephants, rhinos, giraffes, and the first hippopotamus seen in America. In 1857, he inaugurated the "Ocean and River Gardens" at the museum, in which aquariums displayed a collection of exotic fishes, sharks, porpoises, sea lions, and a beluga

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19 Lynn Barber, *The Heyday of Natural History, 1820–1870* (London: Cape, 1980), 13.

20 Harriet Ritvo, *The Platypus and the Mermaid, and Other Figments of the Classifying Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 1–2.

21 Barber, *Heyday of Natural History*, 67.

whale.[22] Yet Barnum is not generally remembered for his zoological collections, but for his humbugs. Alongside the odd but authentic, Barnum displayed his gaffes, such as the Feejee Mermaid, unicorns, frogs with human hands, phoenixes, and other curiosities.[23] But what was genuine and what was counterfeit in the American Museum? The bearded woman, rumored to be nothing more than a man dressed in women's clothing (a rumor started by Barnum himself), turned out to be legitimate.[24] Despite having staged numerous hoaxes and written a book about humbugs, Barnum was convinced by the countless reports and legends of sea monsters from various locations across the globe that they must exist. In a rare moment of candor, he offered $20,000 for an authentic specimen.[25]

In many ways, Barnum's American Museum served as a microcosm for the Victorian world. It was an age of discovery, not only in the natural world, but in all areas of knowledge. The professionalization of the sciences, including zoology, paleontology, and anthropology, was just beginning.[26] At the same time, technological advances created a world almost beyond belief. Just a year before the arrival of the Bear Lake Monster, the *Deseret Evening News* carried an article that stated, "But if this is an age of humbug, it is also an age of wonders." The reporter then described his visit to the Western Union Telegraph Company headquarters in New York City where news from around the world arrived within seconds.[27]

Latter-day Saints and other Americans were a part of this wider world of discovery. A week after the report of the Bear Lake Monster,

22 A. H. Saxon, *P. T. Barnum: The Legend and the Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 90–95.

23 Ibid., 97, 119.

24 Andrea Stulman Dennett, *Weird and Wonderful: The Dime Museum in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 28.

25 Saxon, *P. T. Barnum*, 96.

26 See James Edward McClellan and Harold Dorn, *Science and Technology in World History: An Introduction* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Peter Whitfield, *Landmarks in Western Science from Prehistory to the Atomic Age* (New York: Routledge, 1999); and Paul Bahn, *Archaeology: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

27 "The Cable: An Age of Wonders," *Deseret News Semi-Weekly*, January 15, 1867.

the *Deseret Evening News* carried an article about a giant snake caught in Tennessee that had terrorized a community for years. When finally caught, it measured almost thirty feet long, thirty inches around, and had a mouth twenty-six inches across "armed with a most formidable set of teeth and four large tusks."[28] If Tennessee could reportedly discover such a land animal, why couldn't the newly settled area of Bear Lake produce an even larger and more terrible sea animal? Dinosaur bones being pulled from the earth at an ever-increasing pace also suggested that giant animals fitting the description of the lake monsters once existed.[29]

Similar to other facets of the supernatural world, monsters were something Latter-day Saints were prone to believe in. Rather than making the Mormons unusual, such views made them typical of their time. Although other aspects of supernatural folklore crept into the beliefs and doctrines of early Latter-day Saints, the Bear Lake Monster left barely a trace. Perhaps Mormons, like the visitors to Barnum's American Museum, were willing participants in a hoax that both thrilled and enriched the mysterious and unpredictable world around them.

28 "A Snake Story," *Deseret Evening News*, August 10, 1868.

29 See Mark Jaffe, *The Gilded Dinosaur: The Fossil War Between E. D. Cope and O. C. Marsh and the Rise of American Science* (New York: Crown, 2000).

8

Walking on Water

Nineteenth-Century Prophets and a Legend of Religious Imposture[1]

Stanley J. Thayne

"The Biblical statement from John 4:44, 'A prophet hath no honor in his own country,' is certainly true of Joseph Smith."[2] So spoke Charles J. Decker, town historian of Afton, New York, during a lecture sponsored by the Presbytery of Susquehanna Valley in 1977, nearly 150 years after Smith had left the area. Like most of the prophet-leaders who rose out of the millennial fervor of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Joseph Smith faced frequent persecution and was regarded by most of the general population as a fraud.[3] Naturally, in reaction to his prophetic claims there developed a wealth of folklore depicting the prophet as a religious impostor

1 An earlier version of this essay was awarded the Juanita Brooks Best Undergraduate Paper at the Mormon History Association's Annual Conference, Casper, Wyoming, May 2006, and was subsequently published in the *Journal of Mormon History* 36, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 160–204.

2 Charles J. Decker, "Legends and Local Stories About Joseph Smith, the Mormon," unpublished paper delivered at the *Church History* Seminar sponsored by the Presbytery of Susquehanna Valley, Nov. 19, 1977; copy in possession of the author. I would like to acknowledge both Charles Decker and Taylor Hollist for their valuable assistance and eager sharing of documents and research in this project.

3 See J. Taylor Hollist, "Walking-on-Water Stories and Other Susquehanna River Folk Tales about Joseph Smith," *Mormon Historical Studies* 6 (Spring 2005), 52.

who would stage miraculous displays of divine power to prove his calling. One of the most popular forms of such lore is a walking-on-water legend, which states that Smith staged a public attempt to walk on water to prove the validity of his calling as a prophet. A typical version of this story was published in the *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Chenango County, N.Y. for 1869–70*:

> To convince the unbelievers that he did possess supernatural powers he [Joseph Smith] announced that he would walk upon the water. The performance was to take place in the evening, and to the astonishment of unbelievers he did walk upon the water where it was known to be several feet deep, sinking only a few inches below the surface. This proving to be a success, a second trial was announced which bid fair to be as successful as the first, but when he had proceeded some distance into the river he suddenly went down, greatly to the disgust of himself and proselytes, but to the great amusement of the unbelievers. It appeared on examination that plank were laid in the river a few inches below the surface, and some wicked boys had removed a plank which caused the prophet to go down like any other mortal.[4]

Over time, several variations on this theme developed, and the legend became associated with nearly every location Smith lived and even some places he never did.

The walking-on-water legend probably had its genesis before Smith's involvement in the Susquehanna area. In fact, earlier versions were in circulation before Smith was even born. The legend had previously been associated with Jemima Wilkinson, another prophet from the New York Finger Lakes district who predated Joseph Smith by about fifty years.[5] The legend then moved beyond the Susquehanna area and followed Smith to Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois, where, reportedly, even Abraham Lincoln attended a demonstration. Remarkably, one oral account even purports a demonstration by Smith on the Great Salt Lake in Utah—a particular feat since

4 *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Chenango County, N.Y. for 1869–70* (Syracuse, NY: Hamilton Child, 1869), 82–83.

5 Fawn M. Brodie mentions both tales in No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 83–85. Several variants associated with both figures are listed on the website SaintsWithoutHalos.com.

Smith was martyred before the Saints migrated to the valley of the Great Salt Lake.[6]

Not only did the legends follow Smith beyond the Susquehanna Valley, but the story was subsequently attached to other religious leaders. John Wroe, a Yorkshire prophet and successor of Joanna Southcott and John Turner, had at least two versions of the legend leveled against him: one that he attempted to walk on the water, and the other that he attempted to part the waters of the River Aire and walk across dry-shod.[7] A version of the legend very similar to the Jemima Wilkinson stories was told about James Fisher, a late nineteenth-century religious leader, dubbed the "Nunawading Messiah," who led a millenarian sect in Australia.[8] The tale has also been attached to a "Protestant revivalist charlatan in Virginia" in 1895, a quasi-historical Phoenician woman named Beth-Marion, and a "Hindu Holy man" named Rao in Bombay in 1966.[9] Doubtless the tale has been connected to others.[10]

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6 When the legend teller was informed that this was not possible, since Smith was martyred before the Saints migrated to Utah, the man replied, "That can't be true because that story has been in my family so long it has to be true." Doyle Riley, "Mormon Folklore: The Dock," Wilson, North Carolina, July 1980, collected by Larry A. Pond, 4.9.1.3.2, William A. Wilson Folklore Archives, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

7 See Edward Green, *Prophet John Wroe: Virgins, Scandals and Visions* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2005), 56.

8 See Guy Featherstone, "The Nunawading Messiah: James Fisher and Popular Millenarianism in Nineteenth-Century Melbourne," *The Journal of Religious History* 26, no. 1 (February 2002): 58.

9 The Beth-Marion legend is from the *Urantia Book*, a 2,097-page book of scripture, veiled in authorial mystery, that emerged from Chicago between 1924 and its publication date in 1955; see *The Urantia Book*, 11th ed. (Chicago: Urantia Foundation, 1993). The "Protestant revivalist" version is from a Mormon missionary's journal; see Barre Toelken, "Traditional Water Narratives in Utah," *Western Folklore* 50 (April 1991): 198. The 1966 "Hindu holy man" version is often retold in popular Christian writings, generally citing John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 239; and *Tabletalk*, April 1990, 10.

10 In 1995, an article titled "Priest Drowns in Bid to Walk on Water" was printed in *Indian Skeptic* 7 (April 1995): 30.

These water-walking stories are best classified as *legend*, which one folklorist defined as "a monoepisodic, localized, and historicized traditional narrative told as believable in a conversational mode," which is "typically . . . said to [have occurred] in a specific place and time with named characters." [11] A hallmark feature of legends is oral transmission. Generally, if a legend or tale begins to be printed and published, "folklorists tend to exclude [it] as spurious or contaminated."[12] Printed and published accounts of the water-walking legend, however, read more like transcriptions of an oral narrative than as formal literature. They can therefore act as an approximate representation of otherwise inaccessible nineteenth-century folklore—an oral legend of the past fossilized in print.[13]

Folklorist Timothy R. Tangherlini explains that "legend is characteristically a highly localized narrative . . . Because legend narrators wish their accounts to be believable, they are further inclined to situate the account in the immediate geographical area." He further points out that "a legend told in one area about events linked to a specific place can be found in other areas closely linked to entirely different places." This characteristic of legend explains, as I will demonstrate, why the walking-on-water story seemed to follow Joseph Smith, why the purported locations for Jemima Wilkinson's demonstration were so widespread, and how similar versions were attached to individuals

11 Timothy R. Tangherlini, "Legend," in *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Jan Harold Brunvand (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 437. This definition stands in contrast to a tale, which is generally understood, by both teller and listener, as fictional.

12 Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 2.

13 In an article that creates a portrait of early New England folklore drawn from printed sources, folklorist Richard Dorson explained that printed versions of American folk stories—often published by newspaper humorists or depicted as direct transcriptions from storytellers—characteristically simulated oral delivery and utilized general folk motives. Richard Dorson, "Jonathan Draws the Long Bow," *The New England Quarterly* 16 (June 1943): 278. Such sources, while not technically folkloric, can thus legitimately be used to recover folklore from an earlier period for which we have no legitimate folklore sources. Thanks to William A. Wilson for this insight and for drawing this article to my attention.

who lived on distant parts of the globe. "Just as place names and topographic features of a story are varied to fit the tradition participants' physical environment," Tangherlini continues, "so, too, are proper names and historical referents varied to fit the tradition participants' historical environment." Thus, "identical stories with different named individuals appear in disparate traditions," explaining the identification of the legend with both Jemima Wilkinson and Joseph Smith, as well as John Wroe, James Fisher, and others.[14] The formation and distribution of these stories seem to have been the natural public folk reaction to prophetic claims, religious innovation, millennial fervor, and sectarian proselytizing.

Miracle and Imposture

The water-walking legend has, of course, biblical precedent, portraying these prophet-figures as imitators attempting to perform—or at least appearing to perform—a miracle similar to Jesus Christ's miracle recorded in the New Testament.[15] The ability to walk on water is a symbol of divine or supernatural power in several traditions, including Greek mythology and some sects of Buddhism.[16] In the Christian

14 Tangherlini, "Legend," 437.

15 See Matthew 14:25–31; Luke 6:47–51; John 6:16–21. The Old Testament also contains elements of the legend; the writer of Job ascribes to God, among other powers, the ability to "tread . . . upon the waves of the sea" (Job 9:8).

16 In Greek mythology, Poseidon gave Orion the power to walk on water (see Hesiod, *The Astronomy Frag* 4; and Apollodrus, *The Library* 1.25; quoted in "Encyclopedia: Greek Gods, Spirits, Monsters," http://www.theoi.com/Encyc_O.html.) Ancient Buddhist legends from India tell of the Mahasiddha, enlightened Buddhist disciples who, through meditative practices known as *sadhanas*, can achieve spiritual powers that will allow them, among other things, to walk on water (see Keith Dowman, trans., *Masters of Enchantment: The Lives and Legends of the Mahasiddhas* [Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1989], 14–15). Also in nineteenth-century India, there was reportedly a "charm to walk on the water" with instructions to "wet a cloth in the blood of the snake which has a mouth at both ends; hold it in your mouth, and walk on the water"; see W. H. D. Rouse, "Folklore Items from Northern India Notes and Queries, Vol. IV," *Folklore* 6, no. 4 (December 1895): 411. In the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Khuba movement of northern Thailand, certain Buddhist priests, known as *ton bun*, could possess supernatural powers such as walking on water;

tradition, Jesus's miracle is a sign of his divine status as the Messiah—hence the declaration of the apostles who witnessed the miracle: "Of a truth thou art the Son of God." [17]

Though some nineteenth-century German rationalists had begun to doubt the reality of this miracle—ascribing Jesus's feat to walking on a platform floating just below the water's surface, superb water-treading abilities, or simply misinterpretation of the language of the text[18]—most nineteenth-century Christians seemed to accept the reality of the miracle as a given proof by which, as Adam Clarke's popular nineteenth-century New Testament commentary put it, "Jesus showed forth his

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see Kwaenchewan Buadaeng, "Khuba Movements and the Karen in Northern Thailand: Negotiating Space and Identity" (unpublished paper presented at the international workshop "Cultural Diversity and Conservation in the Making of Mainland Southeast Asia and Southwestern China: Regional Dynamics in the Past and Present," Luang Prabang, Lao P. D. R., February 14–21, 2002).

17 Matthew 14:33.

18 Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 40, summarizes the positions of several authors on this point: Karl Friedrich Bahrdt (1741–92) suggested that "Jesus walked toward the disciples over the surface of a great floating raft; while they, not being able to see the raft, had to suppose a miracle." Bahrdt also points out that "when Peter tried to walk on the water he failed miserably." Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus (b. 1761) believes, Schweitzer states, that "the walking on the water was a vision of the disciples" and offers a more rationalistic possibility: "Jesus walked along the shore, and in the mist was taken for a ghost by the alarmed and excited occupants of the boat. When Jesus called to them, Peter threw himself in the water, and was drawn to the shore by Jesus just after he was sinking." Schweitzer, Historical Jesus, 50. Christoph Friedrich von Ammon "explains the walking on the sea by claiming for Jesus an acquaintance with 'the art of treading water.'" Schweitzer, *Historical Jesus*, 98. As David Friedrich Strauss points out, Paulus argues that "the text does not state that Jesus walked on the water; and that the miracle is nothing but a philological mistake." He suggested that the Greek phrase (from John 6:19), translated as "walking on the sea" (King James Version), is analogous with the Septuagint's phrase in Exodus 14:2, translated as "encamp by the sea" (but literally reading "encamp on the sea"), and "signifies to walk, as the other to encamp, over the sea, that is, on the elevated seashore." David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (London: SCM Press, 1972), 500. Such attempts try to provide historicity for the account but at the same time give a rationalistic explanation, sometimes by attributing deception to Jesus, but usually by suggesting a misguided perception on the part of the disciples.

Godhead."[19] Peter's attempt to walk on the water, though it ultimately failed, was viewed as a demonstration of the power of faith—but, as Clarke emphasized, Peter only did so at the Lord's command. As for the rest of us, "we must take care never to put Christ's power to the proof for the gratification of a vain curiosity; or even for the strengthening of our faith, when the *ordinary* means for doing that are within our reach."[20] Other preachers of the time also seemed to make the distinction between Peter's unique situation—having been commanded by the Lord, in his presence—and that of any other individual. Charles Grandison Finney expressed his explicit belief in the literalness of Christ's miracle but also implied that such a feat is not possible for mere mortals. "If you were to believe that you can walk on the water," states Finney, "and should leap overboard, would your belief save you? Dying sinner, all those refuges of lies will surely deceive and destroy you."[21] In the typical nineteenth-century Christian view, the New Testament narrative demonstrated a onetime miracle possible only to Jesus and, at his command, his apostle, who even then ultimately failed.

Thus, any modern attempt was seen as evidence of imposture. Stories that portrayed self-proclaimed prophets attempting such a feat served first of all to highlight what the teller saw as the audacity if not blasphemy of such individuals, and their failure and subsequent exposure reassured those who chose not to accept the authority of modern prophets. Painting a prophet as an impostor precluded any obligation to follow that person and relieved one of the difficulties discipleship might otherwise incur. Being bombarded by so many religious groups, each vying for converts, created an ambiguity and anxiety that made such weeding out desirable. "The problem of distinguishing true from false prophets was a perennial one," states historian Susan Juster. "Millenarians knew

19 Adam Clarke, ed., *The New Testament of our Lord . . . with A Commentary and Critical Notes* (New York: G. Lane & C. B. Tippett, 1848), 160.

20 Clarke, *New Testament Commentary*, 160. Clarke is somewhat critical of Peter's doubt: "Lord, if it be thou," and his request for a sign, "bid me come unto thee on the water." "A weak faith," Clarke comments, "is always wishing for signs and miracles."

21 Charles G. Finney, "On Refuges of Lies," *The Oberlin Evangelist*, September 29, 1858, available at Gospel Truth Ministries, http://www.gospeltruth.net/1858OE/580929_refuges_of_lies.htm.

that one of the signs of the coming apocalypse as foretold in Revelation was a proliferation of false prophets, and they were acutely aware of the possibilities for fraud and deception."[22] It thus became necessary to separate the wheat from the tares—the true prophets from the impostors. Walking-on-water narratives served as an oral litmus test in this process of elimination—a test the protagonist always lost.

This "imposture thesis" was nothing new.[23] Part of the heritage of the Protestant Reformation, as historian Peter Harrison has illustrated, was the view that "the age of miracles had long ended."[24] In the typical Protestant view, miracle was solely a historical phenomenon that had served the valid function of "establishing the divine mission of Christ" and hence "providing evidential support for the propositional claims of genuine Christianity." Thus "the suggestion that miracles were still being performed counted as evidence only of human credulity" and "ecclesiastical imposture."[25] Such skepticism only increased during the eighteenth century as Enlightenment thinkers and natural philosophers were prone to view any contemporary claims of miracles as deception devised for political or economic gain. "The 'imposture thesis,'" explains historian Leigh Eric Schmidt, "posited two classes of people, priests and dupes, those in the know

22 Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 18.

23 Frank E. Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 47–53; quoted in J. Spencer Fluhman, "Anti-Mormonism and the Question of Religious Authenticity in Antebellum America," *Journal of Religion and Society* 7 (2005): 1.

24 Peter Harrison, "Miracles, Early Modern Science, and Rational Religion," *Church History* 75 (September 2006): 500. Harrison illustrates this by summarizing John Calvin's argument that "miracles had been wrought by Christ and the apostles to confirm the truth of the gospel, and that this had been their sole function. Having accomplished this purpose in the first centuries of the Christian era, miracles were no longer necessary." There were, of course, exceptions to this generalized view, as the performance of miracle and folk magic were considered by many Christians during the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries to be legitimate practices—a belief which experienced a significant surge in parts of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century New England. See D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).

25 Harrison, "Miracles, Early Modern Science," 500–1.

about these tricks and those who were hoodwinked by them."[26] Thus, as historian J. Spencer Fluhman points out, nineteenth-century skeptics "found ready-made conceptual tools when they plunged headlong into this long-standing cultural conversation about religious legitimacy."[27] The water-walking narrative was just another form of the old urge to expose corruption—a formula used previously to expose corrupt priests and now applied to nineteenth-century millenarian enthusiasts and prophets.

Jemima Wilkinson

Though it is impossible to know where, when, and with whom the legend began, available records suggest that the North American genre of water-walking legend may have first been connected with Jemima Wilkinson (1752–1819). Wilkinson was born in Cumberland, Rhode Island, on November 29, 1752. Youthful experiences with the Quaker Society of Friends and the New Lights "conditioned her," according to biographer Herbert Wisbey, "to accept the premise that God communicated His will directly to the human spirit."[28] In 1776, at age twenty-three, Wilkinson became ill with a "fatal Fever"—presumably "Columbus fever," or "the Typhus."[29] During the illness she experienced spells of unconsciousness and a vision in which she was instructed by "too [*sic*] Archangels." She and her followers believed that during this illness she died and was resurrected with a new spirit, which she called "the Publick Universal Friend." This title was generally interpreted to indicate her belief that she was a second Christ—that the spirit of Christ was reincarnated into her body after the death she experienced during her illness.[30]

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26 Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 85.

27 J. Spencer Fluhman, "Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in America" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2006), 28.

28 Herbert A. Wisbey, *Pioneer Prophetess: Jemima Wilkinson, the Publick Universal Friend* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964), 8.

29 Wisbey, *Pioneer Prophetess*, 11.

30 Wisbey, *Pioneer Prophetess*, 12–14.

Naturally, this claim was received with great skepticism by most. That skepticism soon produced stories to illustrate what most believed to be imposture—hence the water-walking legend. Wisbey has found that the legend "is always told in reference to a specific location, which varies, of course, with the storyteller." He has heard the legend attached to at least ten different locations where the performance is supposed to have taken place: "Sneech Pond and other bodies of water in Cumberland and Smithfield, Worden Pond in South Kingston, Yawgoog Pond in Exeter, the Taunton River near Swansea, the Housatonic River near New Milford, the Schulykill near Philadelphia, and various sites on Seneca and Keuka Lakes." He also points out that "the story has several variants, although not as many as locations."[31]

In most versions, Wilkinson does not actually walk out on the water but stops on the shore for a discourse. An 1821 memoir, which is missing many of the elements that became standard in the later versions, can possibly be viewed as the seed from which the later legends sprang. The memoir states that skeptics demanded a sign of Wilkinson, stating that "Jesus Christ walked on the water, and if she was charged with a divine mission from Heaven, it was expected she could do the same." Some of her believers also wanted the reassurance of such a display of power. So she "appointed a time at which she would meet her friends on the margin of the Taunton river, in the town of Swanzey, and convince them of the reality of what she had taught them to believe, by walking on the water." However, after beginning with an "eloquent and fervent prayer" and a discourse on faith, "she told them that if they had faith to believe that she could perform the work of the Lord, they might rest satisfied . . . and as to those who did not believe, they are 'an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given.'"[32]

In this version, told by those sympathetic with Wilkinson's movement, those who demand the sign come out as the dupes, while Wilkinson emerges as a woman of surprising sagacity. However, over

31 Wisbey, *Pioneer Prophetess*, 174.

32 David Hudson, *Memoir of Jemima Wilkinson* (New York: AMS Press, 1972), 184–86; this edition is a reprint of the 1844 second edition; the first edition was printed in 1821 in Bath, New York, by R. L. Underhill & Co.

time the legend began to be told in a somewhat lighter fashion, presenting Wilkinson as cunning, if not deceptive. Wisbey points out that the authenticity of the legend "was strongly denied by Jemima's close friends and followers, who always insisted that the Universal Friend never claimed that her call to preach gave her any divine powers." He further suggests that if the tale has "any basis in fact, that it might be from a sermon in which she attempted to quiet the critics who challenged her assumption of the role of a preacher by demanding that she show some sign of her divinity. Taking her text from Matthew 12:39, she discoursed in great detail on the statement, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign,' concluding with the last of her text, 'and there shall be no sign given to it.'"[33]

Wilkinson seems to have denied the veracity of the tales. In 1869, a writer reported, "As to the miracles which it is pretended she performed it is not surprising that she stoutly denied them in her life time." A man named Hudson recalls Wilkinson saying that "'the servants of the devil have accused me of all manner of wickedness . . . They have accused me of attempting to walk upon the water . . . which thing [is] false.'"[34]

Despite her refutations, the legend continued to be told and retold. It was published again in 1829 in the *Western Palladium* as part of an article under the heading "Jemima Wilkinson":

> This petticoated mis-leader of a band of lunatics from Rhode Island purchased a large and beautiful farm near Seneca Lake, N.Y. which is now in possession of one of her disciples called Aunt Esther: it is not far from Penn-Yan, (or Pennsylvania and Yankee town.) . . . A late traveller relates one of Jemima's miracles, which is quite as convincing as those of the prince bishop Bohmlee. She announced her intention of walking across Seneca Lake, and alighting from her carriage, walked to the water on the white handkerchiefs strewed in the road by her followers; she stopped ankle deep into the water, and then turning to the multitude, inquired whether they had the faith that she could not; on receiving an affirmative answer she returned to her carriage,

33 Wisbey, *Pioneer Prophetess*, 175–76.

34 Israel Wilkinson, *Memoirs of the Wilkinson family in America* (Jacksonville, IL: Davis & Penniman, 1869).

> declaring that as they believed in [her] power, it was unnecessary to display it.[35]

This version of the legend became the most commonly told. It was reprinted in similar form by Thomas Hamilton in his travel narrative *Men and Manners in America*, first published in 1833. Hamilton quotes a "Northern Tourist" and locates the account on Seneca Lake "near Rapelyeas ferry." He adds to the already printed account the presence of a platform—still standing in 1830—which "Jemima constructed to try the faith of her followers," and which she stood upon to announce "her intention of walking across the lake on the water." Hamilton adds that Wilkinson stated that if her followers did not have faith, she would not be able to perform the miracle.[36] The rest of the account reads basically like the *Western Palladium* account.

Wisbey relates other versions. In one, after Wilkinson asks the gathered crowd if they have faith, they demand proof and she rebukes them, replying, "Without thy faith I cannot do it." Another—which Wisbey describes as having a "synthetic flavor"—depicts Wilkinson "actually walking on the water supported by a platform built just below the surface. Of course, someone removed several boards, and she tumbled in[,] to the discomfort of the faithful and the delight of the skeptics."[37] This last version is very similar to the legends that would soon be told about the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith. Meanwhile, across the Atlantic another version of the legend surfaced in Yorkshire, England, attached to nineteenth-century millenarian prophet John Wroe (1782–1863).

John Wroe

Later dubbed "Prophet Wroe," John Wroe was born in Bowling, Yorkshire, in the parish of Bradford. According to his autobiography, he had a difficult childhood, "much despised and abused" by

35 *New Lisbon (OH) Western Palladium* 30, no. 10 (September 5, 1829).

36 Thomas Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), 361; Men and Manners was first published in 1833 in Edinburgh by William Blackwood, in London by T. Cadell, and in Philadelphia by Carey, Lea & Blanchard. The book recounts travels Hamilton conducted in 1830.

37 Wisbey, *Pioneer Prophetess*, 175.

his father, dominated by his brother, and suffering near deafness after being thrown into an ice-covered pond.[38] He struggled in school and also struggled to get along with his father as he worked in his worsted wool manufacturing business in early adulthood. Eventually he set up his own wool-combing business but continued to struggle financially, eventually going bankrupt.[39] He was attacked by fever in 1819, and afterward experienced a series of visionary trances in which he received several revelations. About this same time, he had begun attending Southcottian meetings. In 1821, shortly after the death of George Turner, the leader of a congregation of Southcottian saints, Wroe gained leadership of a large segment of the congregation. He eventually applied the name Christian Israelites to his congregation—a sect that still exists in parts of England and Australia—and enjoyed considerable success, albeit at the price of great persecution.[40]

In 1824, Wroe announced that he would be publicly baptized in the River Aire, near Apperly Bridge, accompanied by singers. Pamphlets announcing the event were distributed throughout the district.[41] The event is listed in nearly every local history that mentions the prophet and is the event with which the water-walking legend is almost always associated, when it is mentioned at all.[42] *The Life and Journal of John Wroe*, which began as an autobiography and was completed by his followers, describes the baptism but, of course, has no mention of any attempt to walk on or part the river. But a local newspaper, the *Leeds Times*, picked up on the event and, embellishing it a bit no doubt, included the story in their columns in 1857.[43]

38 John Wroe, *The Life and Journal of John Wroe,* vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Ashton-Under-Lyne: The Society of Christian Israelites, 1900), 1.

39 S. Baring-Gould, *Yorkshire Oddities: Incidents and Strange Events* (1874; repr., Otley, West Yorkshire: Smith Settle, 1987), 19–20.

40 See Featherstone, "Nunawading Messiah," 46–47.

41 "Folklore," Christian Israelite *Church History*, http://www.cichurchhistory.com/folk.html.

42 Not every local history book that provides a sketch of the event mentions the water-walking part of the baptism, which suggests that it was probably a legend that grew up over time as the event was told and retold.

43 See Green, *Prophet John Wroe*, 56.

This account was repeated "virtually word for word"[44] by William Cudworth in his appropriately titled *Round About Bradford: A Series of Sketches (Descriptive and Semi-Historical)*, and again, in slightly different fashion, in his *Histories of Bolton and Bowling* (1891).

Biographer Edward Green points out that "there are two versions of the supposed nature of the miracle that the crowd was expecting Wroe to perform that day. The first and more widely held view was that Wroe would divide the waters of the Aire and walk across the dry riverbed, as Moses had done with the Red Sea. Others were expecting him to walk on the rapidly flowing waters."[45] Cudworth's first printing of the legend seems to contain elements of both variants, as his description could be interpreted to suggest walking on the water at first but ends with the suggestion that he tried to divide the waters :

> The credentials of John's seership were to be manifest by God enabling him to walk across water dryshod . . . The river Aire persisted in flowing in its usual course, refusing to be divided, and, when the poor prophet launched his frail and trembling frame upon its waters, they proved as treacherous as ever, and John got a ducking.[46]

When Cudworth printed the legend again, the walking on water variant had won out:

> In the year 1824, he gave out that he intended to demonstrate his superhuman powers by walking on the water without wetting his clothes, and at Apperly Bridge actually assembled his "disciples" for the purpose of seeing the accomplishment of the miracle. The crowd being ready, John stalked about gravely, and then, turning round to his expectant followers, announced "that his time had not yet come," and that the miracle would be postponed until a future day, due notice of which would be given.[47]

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44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 William Cudworth, *Round About Bradford: A Series of Sketches* (Descriptive and Semi-Historical), (Bradford, UK: Thomas Brear, 1876), 389.

47 William Cudworth, *Histories of Bolton and Bowling* (Bradford, UK: Thomas Brear, 1891), 844.

This version was again slightly modified and attached to a disciple of Wroe in "an old edition of the Penny Post," but this time the location of the event was downgraded from the River Aire to a "canal which flowed past his house."[48]

The legend has persisted in the Bradford area. In the "Past Times" section of *This is Bradford News*, an article was recently published titled "The Man Who Said He Could Walk on Water."[49] Variations of the legend still float around on Internet websites. Yorksview, "a website dedicated to the County of Yorkshire," recounts the legend in a sketch titled "apperley Bridge."[50]

The Christian Israelite Church still exists today, and members have established a website "as a platform from which to seek to set-right many of the myths and fallacies in the folklore which numerous historians seem to present in the literature as fact!"[51] In a section titled "Folklore," they identify the legend as "personal bias and gossip" produced by newspaper journalists in order to increase sales. They offer a rebuttal to the legend, pointing out that though "this event was advertised through fliers and stated that John Wroe was to be baptized in the River Aire," local newspapers sensationalized the event with the dubious assertion "that John Wroe was going to part the waters, as Moses did, or walk on water as Jesus did." The church pointed out this discrepancy to Yorksview, which had published both the pamphlet and the water-walking or water-parting legend on its website, and in response Yorksview promptly removed the pamphlet.[52] Thus the legend persists despite the efforts of the faithful to defend the reputation of their religion's founder.

48 Green, *Prophet John Wroe*, 57–58.

49 Jim Appleby, "The Man Who Said He Could Walk on Water," *This is Bradford News*, August 18, 2003.

50 "Apperley Bridge," at Yorksview, http://www.yorksview.co.uk/.

51 Christian Israelite *Church History*, http://www.cichurchh.

52 See "Folklore," Christian Israelite *Church History*, http://www.cichurchhistory.com/folk.html.

James Fisher

John Wroe spent his last years proselytizing in western Australia, which is where another variant of the water-walking legend surfaced, this time attached to a sort of successor of Wroe known as the "Nunawading Messiah." James Cowley Morgan Fisher (1832–1913), who would become a millenarian prophet and lead a congregation of faithful followers, was born in Bristol, England. He shortly after moved with his parents to Adelaide, Australia, where he spent his early childhood. He ran away at age fourteen to work several years at sea as a sailor and then in the goldfields. After achieving some success in the goldfields, he purchased land in the parish of Nunawading. His first wife died in 1855, followed by their two children shortly thereafter. In 1858, he married Emma Pickis Kefford, who introduced him to the Church of the Firstborn, which had been established by her mother.[53]

By 1860–61, Fisher had gained leadership of the Church of the Firstborn.[54] Legend grew up around his rise to power. One defected member recounted that Fisher claimed to have received a revelation that Shiloh—the Messiah who had purportedly been conceived by the English (virgin) prophet Joanna Southcott (1750–1814), who unfortunately died childless—had actually been born, but was taken up into heaven. "Fisher was told that the spirit of the son, that was Messiah, had descended from heaven upon some cabbages in his garden. He was to eat the cabbages and then he would have the spirit."[55] Whatever his claims were based on, Fisher had become the leader of a band of faithful followers, eventually known as "the Fisherites, some fifty men and women of eccentric habit and cast-iron virtue . . . [who] gathered in Nunawading from miles around."[56]

53 See Featherstone, "Nunawading Messiah," 42–44; I have relied heavily on Featherstone for biographical information on Fisher. See also Niall Brennan, *A History of Nunawading* (Melbourne: Hawthorne Press, 1972), 81.

54 Brennan, *A History of Nunawading*, 81, gives the year 1860, whereas Featherstone, "Nunawading Messiah," 44, gives 1861.

55 Featherstone, "Nunawading Messiah," 44.

56 Ivan Southall, *A Tale of Box Hill: Day of the Forest* (Melbourne: Box Hill City Council, 1957), 64. Southall further describes the gathering: "They walked from the city west, from the railway terminus at Hawthorn, and from the

Legendary descriptions of Fisher developed over time. Local historian Ivan Southall wrote, "James Cowley Morgan Fisher was a magnificent specimen over six feet tall, with the features of a Greek god, the shoulders of a giant, and a flowing mane of white hair. His beard, too, was long and white, and his eyes were pools of power."[57] For a man of such legendary proportions, it was natural that the water-walking legend would also be attached to him.

The variant attached to Fisher is more in line with the Jemima Wilkinson legend, suggesting that he was testing the faith of his followers. The legend seems to have first been preserved in the "Notes" of Dudley Boyle, "grandson of David Boyle who had fallen out with Fisher sometime before the events of 1871."[58] It has been treated as legend by most secondary authors. Southall writes:

> Legend said that Fisher took his people to Blackburn Lake to pray while he worked a miracle. 'Do you believe?' he boomed from the shore. 'Have you the faith that I can walk upon the water?'
>
> 'Halleluiah,' they cried. 'We believe.'
>
> Fisher raised his eyes to heaven. 'Then I have no need to do it.'[59]

Other authors have also placed the event on artificial Blackburn Lake, constructed in 1889. The elements are the same in the few accounts I have gathered—Fisher's booming voice, the gathered crowd expressing their faith, and his response that their faith precluded any need for him to perform the miracle.

Most authors who have recounted the legend treat it as a false rumor "circulated in order to make Fisher appear ridiculous and a figure of fun."[60] Guy Featherstone points out that the account was "detailed by hostile sources," and Southall states, "Such is the stuff of legend because, strangely, the hearts of many seek to discredit the hearts of good men."[61]

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mountains in the east to worship God in the open air and to pay homage to their Messiah."

57 Southall, *Box Hill*, 64.

58 Featherstone, "Nunawading Messiah," 58.

59 Southall, *Box Hill*, 64–65.

60 Featherstone, "Nunawading Messiah," 58.

61 Featherstone, "Nunawading Messiah," 58; Southall, Box Hill, 65.

Joseph Smith

If the water-walking legend began with Jemima Wilkinson, it greatly expanded after becoming associated with Joseph Smith (1805–1844).[62] Perhaps due to the greater success and mobility of Smith's movement, the legend became more prolific, varied, and geographically distributed than in the case of Wilkinson or any subsequent figure.

A typical instinct of legend purveyors is to provide validating formulas, such as the names of individuals involved, a specific location and time, and the names of those who witnessed the event. Though location was present in several Wilkinson tales, these validating formulas became much more prevalent and specific in Smith's legends. Other prominent Mormon leaders, such as Brigham Young and Sidney Rigdon, were implicated, and specific witnesses were identified, often a distant relative of the teller or one of the teller's friends. Some of the accounts are actually reminiscent affidavits of men who claimed, over fifty years after the "fact," to have witnessed the event as children. The earliest printed accounts do not even identify the water-walker as Smith but some other "Mormon preacher."[63] Some accounts simply refer to the water-walker as a Mormon without specifying Smith. Eventually, however, the legend morphed to center upon Smith, a focus it maintained thereafter.

Though the legend has been passed on primarily through oral transmission, printed versions of the legend appeared in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century newspaper articles, county histories, and anti-Mormon pamphlets. Legends by definition are anonymous, and it is therefore impossible to determine when and where the legend originated or even when it was first put into print. The earliest printed accounts uncovered to date locate the incident in New York, making it plausible that the legend—insofar as it is associated with Smith—originated in New York and then spread from there.[64] But several affidavits

62 The best biographical treatment of Smith is Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith, Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005). See also Brodie, Life of Joseph Smith.

63 *Evening and Morning Star* 2, no. 19 (April, 1834): 151.

64 See Stanley J. Thayne, "A Mormon Missionary's Response to the Joseph Smith

make Kirtland, Ohio, another likely site of provenance. Wherever and however the legend began, accounts quickly spread in pamphlets, newspapers, and by word of mouth, making their way across the country and the Atlantic. Versions of the legend emerged for nearly every place Smith ever lived, and even for some places he never set foot.

New York

Joseph Smith moved to South Bainbridge (now Afton) in Chenango County, New York, in 1825 to work for Josiah Stowell, who was searching for a lost Spanish silver mine.[65] Smith had various responsibilities, including attempts at locating these mines and hidden treasures through the use of a seer stone. This locality is one of the areas in which the walking-on-water incident is supposed to have taken place.[66]

The earliest extant printed version of the water-walking legend is an 1834 article titled "Tragical Event" printed in the Philadelphia *Saturday Courier*, April 19, 1834. Complicating the issue of provenance, the "tragical story" was "given by the editor of the *Independent Messenger*," which suggests it may have been printed previously. Latter-day Saints of the time took notice of the *Saturday Courier* article, and it was reproduced and refuted in two LDS periodicals, the *Evening and Morning Star* and *Messenger and Advocate*. Interestingly, this account does not identify the protagonist of the tale as Joseph Smith but as a "Mormon preacher." Also, the account states that the preacher "perished" when he fell in, further precluding the possibility of its association with Smith specifically. The story is based upon "the authority of a gentleman from the western part of the state of New York." A hint of skepticism—or at

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Water-walking Folklore of Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania," *Susquehanna County Historical Society Journal of Genealogy & Local History* 16, no. 1 (May 2005): 3–8.; and Hollist, "Walking-on-Water Stories."

65 See Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 48–52; and Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 4:3.

66 A folklore student at Brigham Young University collected a variant from Etna, New York, in 1946, that placed the legend in Palmyra, New York, which is where Smith resided before (and periodically after) his move to South Bainbridge, where the New York legend seems to have originated. Mr. Carberry, "Historical Legend," Etna, New York, 1946, collected by Laura M. Creer, 4.19.1.3.1, William A. Wilson Folklore Archives.

least caution—is voiced by the editor, who states, "We shall expect to see it authenticated by the western papers if it be true."

The location of this account is identified as a "town where the delusion had made numerous converts"—presumably Colesville, New York, or nearby.[67] The site of the exhibition is a pond that "was extremely shallow; a thin sheet of water covering a common swamp mire" that was "found to be of a consistency nearly strong enough, except within a small central space, to sustain the weight of a man."[68] It was at this small central space in the middle that the "line of plank" was laid and "a few wicked Lamanites" sawed through it, causing the Mormon preacher to fall in and drown, a "victim to his imposture."[69]

By 1869, the legend appeared in local New York literature. In that year, the *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Chenango County, N.Y.* printed a version of the legend (quoted in the introduction above) that seems to have become a standard for subsequent publications and probably set the tone for much of the later oral tradition. The legend was printed again in 1880 in nearly identical form in a *History of Chenango and Madison Counties*.[70]

Sometime just prior to 1880, journalist Frederic G. Mather ventured into the Susquehanna region and conducted interviews with locals to gather information on Mormonism. In 1880, he published two

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67 The first branch of the LDS Church was organized in Colesville, New York, in 1830. Colesville contained significantly more members of the church than surrounding areas, due primarily to the Joseph Knight family (see Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 114).

68 Perch or Pickerel Pond, near Colesville, New York, is one location that is rumored by locals to be the site of the water-walking incident (see Hollist, "Walking-on-Water Stories," 40).

69 *Evening and Morning Star* 2, no. 19 (April, 1834): 151. "Lamanite" is a Book of Mormon ethnic term which is used facetiously in this account to represent a trickster.

70 *Business Directory of Chenango County*, 82–83; James Smith, *History of Chenango and Madison Counties, New York with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Some of its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Syracuse, NY: D. Mason & Co., 1880), 154. A comparison of the two accounts shows that of the 148 words Smith used in his account, 113 were the exact words used in the 1869 Gazetteer, with the same sentence constructions. The variants are mostly synonyms, and an extra sentence at the end.

articles on Mormonism, one in the *Binghamton Daily Republican*, and one in *Lippincott's Magazine*.[71] In both he mentions the water-walking legend. He gathered his information, as he states, "from very credible eye witnesses, who are now among the aged, and honored, and trusted of their townships" and who "were among the youth at the time of Joe Smith's earlier adventures." In his *Binghamton Daily Republican* article, he identifies George Collington and Mrs. Harriet Marsh as citizens of the Harpursville area who told him of the legend. (Names and places are credibility-building details often used in the legend process.) Mather presumes, based on the accusations of others, that Collington may have been the one guilty of "taking up the Prophet's bridge and letting him souse in the river."[72]

George Collington was a major purveyor of the legend in the New York area and is also the source of an account that was printed in 1885 in H. P. Smith's *History of Broome County*. Smith recounts the usual description of the story, as told to him by Collington, and then quips, "If Mr. Collington knows who did the deed, he declines to tell; but he smiles."[73]

In 1899, Lu B. Cake published *Peepstone Joe and the Peck Manuscript*, in which he quotes the walking-on-water legend from the 1869 *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Chenango County, N.Y.* Cake embellishes the tale with his own humorous flourishes, personifying the river as "one of God's honest creations" which "is rippling and chuckling with laughter over Joe's spectacular ducking . . . [as] are the people, unto this day."[74] An account of the legend was printed

71 Frederic G. Mather, *Binghamton Daily Republican*, July 29, 1880; "Early Days of Mormonism," *Lippincott's Magazine* 26 (August 1880): 198–211.

72 Mather, *Binghamton Daily Republican*, July 29, 1880.

73 H. P. Smith, *History of Broome County* (Syracuse, NY: D. Mason & Co., 1885), 332.

74 Lu B. Cake, *Peepstone Joe and the Peck Manuscript* (New York: L. B. Cake, 1899), 12–14; see also Hollist, "Walking-on-Water Stories," 35. Cake alluded to the legend once again in his 1912 Susquehanna Stories, by stating that "down the river [from Afton] is Mormon Ducking Stool; where Joe pretended to walk on water and was ducked." Lu B. Cake, *Susquehanna Stories with Illustrations, Traditions and Prodigies* (Afton, NY: Enterprise Press, 1912); reproduced by Austin Fife, FMC III 131, Fife Folklore Archives.

in 1900 in the *Oneonta Herald*, which identifies the local Cornwall boys as those who discovered the planks and sawed one of them.[75] In this account, after Smith falls into the water he tells his watchers that "their faith had weakened and that his alone was not sufficient to support him on the water."[76]

Continued recitals of the legend into the twentieth century may be an indication of the hostile feelings locals still harbored toward Smith and Mormonism. A 1901 article in the *Afton Enterprise* identifies Mormonism as "an evil that threatens the nation and home," citing the water-walking legend to illustrate that though Mormonism had gained strength and success, it was perceived by the general population as "very ludicrous."[77]

In 1929, Afton, New York, resident Bert Lord applied to the Division of Archives and History of the State Education Department to have a sign erected to identify the location of Joseph Smith's water-walking attempt, stating that the legend is a "fact" that had been "handed down by tradition." The request was granted, and "between the highway and the river near the Broome & Chenango County lines" a sign was placed which read, "Joseph Smith, Founder of Mormonism, Endeavored in 1827 to Walk on Water Nearby. The Venture Was Not a Success."[78] The placement of this historical marker—though it did not

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75 The Cornwalls were a prominent family in South Bainbridge (now Afton), New York. They owned a large farm on the east side of the Susquehanna River. A small creek currently called Cornell Creek flows through this property. See Hollist, "Walking-on-Water Stories," 40, 51n21.

76 *Oneonta Herald*, January 18, 1900. The weakened-faith excuse is a common element with variants in several versions of the legend.

77 "An Evil That Threatens the Nation and Home," *Afton Enterprise*, November 7, 1901.

78 "Afton Gets Plaques For Points As Named," *Norwich Sun*, December 14, 1932; Hollist, "Walking-on-Water Stories," 39; and Decker, "Legends and Local Stories About Joseph Smith," 4; Taylor Hollist's article is the most comprehensive research on the history of this sign and its removal. A similar sign was placed near Cornell Creek that incorrectly identified the spot as the place where "Joseph Smith in 1827 Dug For and Claimed to Find Some of the Plates of the Mormon Bible one-half Mile up This Creek." This sign is currently housed in the Afton Historical Society museum.

last long after some "Mormon Elders going thru" saw it[79]—indicates the strong oral tradition of transmitting the water-walking legend that continued well into the twentieth century and even to the present in the Susquehanna region. Local historian John Goodell refers to the water-walking legend as the "most often repeated" of a "body of legends and memories" about Joseph Smith.[80]

The legend continued to appear in New York newspapers, often reproducing the 1869 version,[81] and sometimes associating the legend with other areas, such as Ohio.[82] It became the subject of local lectures and publications and was even reproduced as a historical sketch, titled "'Wicked' Boys Foil a Prophet," on a card advertising the Seymour Funeral Home, in Oxford, New York. [83]

In April 1946, folklorists Austin and Alta Fife traveled into the Susquehanna Valley of New York and Pennsylvania collecting oral accounts of the legend in the towns of Afton, Nineveh, Bainbridge, and Susquehanna. Austin Fife concluded: "It is apparent that almost everyone who has lived for any time in the communities between Bainbridge and Susquehanna is familiar with the story of Joseph Smith's attempt to walk on the water, and of the practical joke that was played on him. Evidently there are several different locations on the Susquehanna River where this is supposed to have taken place, and the

79 Hollist, "Walking-on-Water Stories," 40; in a letter written in 1938, Lord states that after Mormon elders passed through the area, the marker "very soon disappeared."

80 John Goodell, "Joseph Smith in Susquehanna Country: Mormon Beginnings," in *Notes and Sketches from along the Susquehanna: Essays in Celebration of American Methodism's Bicentennial* (Rutland, VT: Academy Books, 1984), 44.

81 "Afton's Part Interesting in Founding Mormonism," *Binghamton Sun*, February 19, 1933.

82 "Balked Effort to Walk on Water," *New York Times*, March 24, 1904.

83 In 1957, Columbia professor emeritus Carlton J. H. Hayes spoke at the Centennial Celebration of the Town of Afton and mentioned the water-walking legend; see Hayes, *Story of Afton: A New York Town on the Susquehanna* (Deposit, NY: Valley Offset, 1961), 16. Charles Decker's speech, "Legends and Local Stories," (mentioned above) occurred in 1977. I obtained a photocopy of the Seymour Funeral Home ad from Charles Decker. It is printed on a card and does not have a date printed on it. The wording is very similar to the 1869 *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Chenango County.*

grandparents of more than one local inhabitant are said to be among the boys who removed the plank."[84]

Many New York locals treat the legend as a given fact, locating the event, by tradition, at "Perch or Pickerel Pond" in Colesville, "on the Susquehanna River near the residence of the faithful Joe Knight,"[85] or "on the Cornwall farm on the East Side south of Afton."[86] But some locals are skeptical, such as John Goodell, who stated that "the story has too much of the character of Yankee humor in which the know-it-all outsider is done in by the supposedly inferior locals."[87]

England

The legend made its way across the Atlantic to Preston, England, by 1838. The *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* states that "immediately after Elders Kimball and Hyde left Preston, on or about the 15th of April [1838], one [Richard] Livesey (a Methodist preacher, who had previously spent some years in America . . .) came out with a pamphlet, made up of forged letters, apostate lies, and 'walk on the water' stories, he found in old American papers, which he picked up while in America."[88] Livesey appears to have printed several pamphlets on Mormonism, the best-known of which is *An Exposure of Mormonism*, which is often credited as the first anti-Mormon tract in England.[89]

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84 Austin E. Fife, Afton New York, April 14, 1946, FMC I 167, Fife Folklore Archives.

85 Nan Hill, "The Beginning of Mormonism," quoted in Hollist, "Walking-on-Water Stories," 50, which states that according to Decker, "Hill's paper was probably written in the 1920s."

86 Decker, "Legends and Local Stories," 5; based on an article by Harvey Baker in the *Oneonta Herald*, January 18, 1900.

87 Goodell, "Joseph Smith in Susquehanna Country," 45; as quoted in Hollist, "Walking-on-Water Stories," 51.

88 Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. Brigham H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 3:22. The History goes on to assert that Livesey "said he heard nothing about the Saints in America" and "stopped the circulation of his own pamphlet by stating to a public congregation, that he accidentally found the contents of his pamphlet in old papers in his trunk."

89 See Richard Livesey, *An Exposure of Mormonism, Being A Statement of Facts Relating to the Self-Styled "Latter Day Saints," And the Origin of the Book of*

Though this pamphlet does not mention the walking-on-water legend, another undated pamphlet, titled *More Trickery of Mormonism*, which appears to have come from the same period, does contain the legend and is therefore most likely one of the Livesey pamphlets referred to in *History of the Church*. This version is unique because it is one of the few that does not mention the use of planks but rather states that Smith placed "2 ropes under the water drawn from bank to bank" and that "some wag cut the ropes during the pretended miracle." In this account the protagonist did not drown, but it does suggest that "had it not been for the timely interposition of a party who had stationed themselves favourably for the purpose, Joe Smith would at this moment been in the land of spirits."[90]

Ohio

It is possible that the water-walking legend actually originated in Ohio. Early missionary success in Kirtland, Ohio—including the conversion of Campbellite preacher Sidney Rigdon and much of his congregation—led Joseph Smith to headquarter the church there from February 1831 to 1838. In October 1830, missionaries en route to Missouri had preached the new gospel in Ohio and had gained a significant number of converts; but they continued on to their mission field, leaving the infant congregations to themselves without any real leadership or guidance. When Smith arrived in February 1831, he found many of the Saints in the area engulfed in ecstatic religious enthusiasm typical of frontier revivalism—barking, jumping up on stumps, preaching in unknown tongues, and making other displays of spiritual excitement. Some have suggested that if the legend contained any seed of truth, it may have been

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Mormon (Preston, UK: J. Livesey, 1838). Another pamphlet printed by J. Livesey about the same time is *Remarks on the Doctrines, Practices, &c. of the Latter-Day Saints: Setting Forth the Marvellous Things Connected with this New Light From America* (Preston, UK: J. Livesey, n.d.); the author does not identify himself or herself by name but rather as "A Lover of Truth." It is very likely Richard Livesey.

90 [Richard Livesey?] *More trickery of Mormonism brought to light; Giving the full particulars of the schemes and practices of Joseph Smith, The Angelite* (n.p.: Ambler, [ca. 1838]), 4. See Chad J. Flake and Larry Draper, *A Mormon Bibliography, 1830–1930* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2004), 5463a.

in association with such events.[91] The connection, however, seems tangential at best. Like those centered at New York, the versions associated with Ohio eventually found their way into print as newspaper articles, affidavits in anti-Mormon pamphlets, and in journals and autobiographies.

In 1888, an anti-Mormon publication titled *Naked Truths about Mormonism* printed six affidavits that mention the walking-on-water legend and identify the location as Ohio.[92] These affidavits were apparently collected by the publisher, Arthur B. Deming, whose father, Minor Deming, was sheriff in Hancock County, Illinois, which included the Mormon city of Nauvoo. Minor Deming was considered a friend of the Nauvoo Mormons and went to great lengths—even at the peril of his own life—to protect the Saints from mobocracy. In *Naked Truths*, Arthur Deming related memories of his childhood in Nauvoo, with particular attention to the assassination of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. He stated that "from childhood" he had been friendly toward the Mormon people and that he planned to "continue that friendship." However, his attitude toward Mormonism changed, and a current objective in his life was to thoroughly convince "all honest Mormons . . . that they have been most wickedly and cruelly deceived."[93]

It is not clear exactly when Deming's attitude changed, but it may have been after he moderated a debate in Kirtland in 1884 between Clark Braden, a Disciple of Christ minister, and Edmund L. Kelley, presiding bishop of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS). "Mr. Braden, the opponent of Mormonism," Deming states, "was unable to satisfactorily prove some points he claimed, and he engaged a party to collect evidence to sustain his position. The party did not accomplish much and I undertook the business." In 1888, he wrote: "I began in March, 1884, and have been engaged in it much of the time since."[94]

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91 Mark L. Staker, e-mail to Stanley Thayne, November 6, 2006. Thanks to Mark Staker for his expertise on this section. See Milton V. Backman Jr., *Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio*, 1830–1838 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 59–62.

92 Arthur B. Deming, *Naked Truths About Mormonism* (Oakland, CA: Deming & Co., 1888), 8 pp.; published as a one-volume newspaper in two parts.

93 Deming, *Naked Truths*, 1.

94 Ibid.

Four of Deming's six affidavits that include the walking-on-water legend are secondhand, but two of the affidavits are by men who claim to have been eyewitnesses. Each of these affidavits is signed by witnesses (including but not limited to Deming), and several are sworn to and subscribed before a justice of the peace.[95] One affidavit, by a person "whose name is withheld for prudential reasons," mentions the walking-on-water legend only cursorily: "Jo Smith claimed he could do anything Jesus Christ did. He refused to walk on the water in the day-time because Jesus walked in the night." In another account, Joseph Harvey and Samuel Rogers swear that they heard a Mormon preacher "say in his sermon that . . . he saw him [Smith] walk on the water in Kirtland." This version is unique since it attributes the tale's distribution to a Mormon source who used the legend as a proof of Mormonism. A third affidavit, William Rockafellow's, attributes distribution of the legend to an apostate Mormon elder, Leonard Rich, who left the LDS Church after being instructed by Smith, as he claims, to kill Grandison Newell. Rockafellow "resided in Kirtland after the Mormons had mostly left." His affidavit records various episodes that Rich told him after Rich had left the church.

F. J. Goldsmith recounts a version of the legend told him by John A. Eddy. Eddy claimed that Goldsmith's father and Grandison Newell hired him to watch the Mormons every night after Smith announced that "at such a time he would walk on the water." According to Goldsmith, Eddy continued: "The night before the walking was to be, Jo Smith, [Sidney] Rigdon, Brigham Young, and William Aldrich[96] worked half the night and drove forked stakes in the river in the form of a horseshoe" upon which they "placed green sycamore slabs which

95 The justices of the peace are from Painesville and Willoughby in Lake County, and one account (not sworn before a justice) is from Russell, Geauga County. Textual evidence, such as the consistent spelling of "Jo Smith," seems to suggest that one scribe (probably Deming) recorded each of these affidavits.

96 William Aldrich lived in Kirtland during 1836–38. Brigham Young first visited Kirtland in the fall of 1832 and moved there in the fall of 1833. He lived there, though he was absent serving missions during much of the time, until December 1837. Sidney Rigdon was in Kirtland during most of the time the Saints were located in the city.

would sink in the water on the crotched stakes." Eddy also claims to be the one who then "removed one of the slabs near the center."

Joel Miller, another "eyewitness," was born in Peekskill, New York, in 1814, and moved to Willoughby, Ohio, with his parents in 1825. He would have been fifteen when the first Latter-day Saints passed through Kirtland in October–November 1830, and he would have been twenty-four when the main body of the Saints left the area in 1838. After describing the ecstatic elements in Mormon meetings, Miller claims that at one point his neighbors "informed us Jo Smith, on Sunday night, was going to walk on the water and urged our family to go." Miller and his brother attended the performance with "Enos and Joel Smith, whose parents were Mormon." The performance was preceded by "a meeting in the schoolhouse at the Flats in Kirtland." After Smith and Rigdon spoke to the congregation, "all went to the river east and below the bridge." There Smith donned a white robe and preached about faith as he walked on the water. "He was out of water except for his feet." As usual, he was successful to a certain point and then went down.

The other purported eyewitness was J. M. Granger, who was born in Tioga County, New York, in 1820. He moved to Chester, Ohio, in 1829, about two years before the Latter-day Saints arrived in Kirtland. He would have been in his teens during the time the main body of the Latter-day Saints were in Ohio. He recalls "going to Kirtland one evening with a two horse wagon load of men and boys to see the Mormon prophet Jo Smith, walk on the water." He also mentions the white robe and an address on faith. He claims to have been "seventy five to a hundred feet from him" during the performance.

The 1888 Deming affidavits were reproduced sometime between 1908 and 1912 by Reverend Robert Burns Neal (1847–1925), general secretary and field agent for the American Anti-Mormon Association, in a pamphlet from his *Sword of Laban Leaflets* series titled "Did Joseph Smith Walk on Water?" In this leaflet, Neal creates a collage of the affidavit accounts, filling in the gaps liberally with dialogue. He imaginatively suggests that the plot was hatched during a discussion between Brigham Young and Sidney Rigdon about what they could do to "increase faith in the miraculous power

of the Prophet."[97] A statement at the end of this sketch indicates that the section on water walking is a "sample chapter" of his "Hand Book for Anti-Mormon Polemics."[98]

In 1904, the *New York Times* reprinted a version of the legend that had first appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*. This telling, recounted by one C. H. Cartwell, who remembered it from stories his grandma told him, locates the water-walking event at Mud Creek (where, conveniently, "the water is always muddy") in Muskingum County, Ohio.[99] In 1938, the *Christian Standard* of Cincinnati, Ohio, published a version of the legend as part of a multipart series titled "Autobiography of a Pioneer Preacher." The pioneer preacher was Jasper Jesse Moss (1806–1890), a schoolteacher and preacher for the Disciples of Christ in the Kirtland area during the 1830s. Incidentally, Moss was married to Cordelia Hutt, a niece of Eber D. Howe, the editor and publisher of the preeminent anti-Mormon book *Mormonism Unvailed*.[100] Moss was an ardent opponent of Mormonism and participated in debates against Mormon elders.[101] The "Autobiography" was edited by his son M. M. Moss. Moss's version of the legend (as edited by his son after his death), appears under the heading "The 'Angel' Goes Under." When the Mormons held evening baptismal services, "an angel appeared on the bank of the stream opposite the group and walked out on the water and stood viewing the scene." The next day, a few individuals discovered "a two-inch plank" and sawed it "almost in two." On the next demonstration, the plank of course gave way and there was "a splash

97 Robert Burns Neal, "Did Joseph Smith Walk on Water?" *Sword of Laban Leaflet*, series 2, no. 17, 3–4.

98 Neal, "Did Joseph Smith Walk on Water?" 4.

99 *New York Times*, March 24, 1904; I would like to thank Nancy Mess, of Ithaca, New York, for pointing this article out to me.

100 See J. J. Moss to James T. Cobb, January 23, 1879, Theodore Albert Schroeder papers: Box 2, folder 1, Wisconsin State Historical Society Library, Madison, Wisconsin; transcription available at Spaulding Studies Library, http://solomonspalding.com/docs/Wil1878a.htm#1938. *Mormonism Unvailed* was published in Painesville, Ohio, by Eber D. Howe in 1834.

101 See A. S. Hayden, *Early History of the Disciples in the Western Reserve, Ohio* (Cincinnati: Chase & Hall, 1875), 409.

and a shriek as the angel's bright glory was extinguished beneath the waves."[102]

In *Buckeye Disciples: A History of the Disciples of Christ in Ohio* (1952), Henry K. Shaw draws on the 1938 *Christian Standard* article to reproduce the water-walking legend.[103] According to Shaw, J. J. Moss and Isaac Moore "pretended to be interested so they could enter the inner circle of the movement to expose its weakness."[104] Moss does insinuate this plan in some of his letters, but he also states that his plans were foiled.[105] He then began telling Ohio congregations "how Angels could be manufactured & strange wonders made to appear in the night," in order to expose the Mormons.[106] But he later admitted, "I know nothing of how the Mormons manufactured Angels. I only know how it could be done."[107] Moss did not mention the water-walking legend directly in any of his extant letters, only that "strange wonders . . . in the night" occurred. But sometime between his 1878–80 letters and his son's 1938 biography, those "strange wonders" became a highly formularized legend with all the classic elements of the other water-walking tales.

In neither version of Moss's edited autobiography is Joseph Smith identified as the water-walking angel. Historian Mark Staker believes that Moss's account "reflects in some ways a pre-1831 Kirtland" and thus may be describing events that occurred in Kirtland before Joseph Smith even came to Ohio. In his narrative, Moss had previously described a nighttime Mormon sacrament service with similar

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102 M. M. Moss, ed., "Autobiography of a Pioneer Preacher," *Christian Standard*, January 15, 1938.

103 Shaw claims that J. J. Moss recorded the event in his diary; however, he cites "Autobiography of a Pioneer Preacher" (which is not Moss's diary), which was edited and published by Moss's son, M. M. Moss, after J. J. Moss's death. Shaw also insinuates that it was Moss and Moore who found the planks, but "Autobiography of a Pioneer Preacher" makes no such assertion.

104 Henry K. Shaw, *Buckeye Disciples: A History of the Disciples of Christ in Ohio* (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1952), 83–84.

105 See J. J. Moss to J. T. Cobb, December 17, 1878, Theodore A. Schroeder papers.

106 Moss to Cobb, December 17, 1878.

107 Moss to Cobb, January 23, 1879.

"angel" visitations, but he "does not cast Joseph Smith as the main character in this story" either. In fact, Moss went on to explain that "it was getting near springtime and Joseph Smith sent these Mormons a revelation that their performances were of the devil and must cease. Accordingly they partook of the sacrament in the daytime, in the presence of all the people, and . . . the visits of the angels all came to an end."[108] Thus, Moss sees Smith as an agent involved in stopping these activities, not as a participant or perpetrator. Further, based on dates of events such as Moss's wedding and departure from Kirtland, which occurred around the time Joseph Smith arrived in the area, Staker concludes that "if anything, [Moss] reflects an early iteration of the story being told before Joseph even arrived in Kirtland [which] . . . suggests that it was already in circulation by Feb. 1831."[109]

Pennsylvania

During Joseph Smith's employment as a treasure digger for Josiah Stowell in southern New York, he spent some time in Susquehanna, Pennsylvania. Stowell's digging company, which included Smith, boarded with the Isaac Hale family in Harmony (now Oakland), Pennsylvania, which is where Joseph met Emma Hale, whom he married in 1827. From 1827 to 1830, Joseph and Emma lived in a small cabin on property purchased from Hale, near the banks of the Susquehanna River. Years later, the walking-on-water legend became associated with this area.

The water-walking legend was printed in Philadelphia early on (though these accounts were probably associated with the New York legends). An example is the article "Tragical Event" from 1834.[110] In 1835, Elder John Ellis, a Christian minister in Salem, Pennsylvania, wrote a letter to the editor of *Christian Palladium* that mentions a paper published in Philadelphia titled "Temple of Reason" that "refers to the miracles wrought by the Mormons, their walking on the water,

108 Moss, "Pioneer Preacher."

109 Mark L. Staker, e-mail to Stanley Thayne.

110 "Tragical Event," *Philadelphia Saturday Courier*, April 19, 1834.

or rather getting drowned in it."[111] While it is apparent that the legend was circulating through parts of Pennsylvania, it was not identified with Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania, until the late nineteenth century and did not appear in print in that context until the early twentieth century.

In a "Prize Essay" printed in the *Montrose Democrat* in 1907, Margaret Hawes of Oakland (formerly Harmony), Pennsylvania, relates a version of the legend and identifies the location as Smith's farm in Harmony "at the river bank."[112] Reportedly, Smith "fastened planks from the shore to the Island." However, rather than the usual removed plank, in this version "a mischievous fellow partly cut the cords that held the planks and Joseph's weight when he got into the middle of the river let him down." [113] The legend appeared again in 1919 in a *Montrose Independent Republican* article announcing that the old Joseph Smith home had burned down. In this version, the prank was attributed to "small boys" and the structure was a "submerged bridge." After Joseph failed, in this account, "he hied away to a haven of refuge where he remained in seclusion for some time" (an element that still shows up in some oral accounts).[114] Famed psychologist B. F. Skinner, who grew up in the town of Susquehanna, just across the river from Oakland, between 1904 and 1922, recalled in his autobiography "scurrilous stories" about Smith, including the water-walking legend.[115]

Though the legend was surely being told orally in Susquehanna County for years before these newspaper articles were printed, there is evidence that the legend probably was not associated with Pennsylvania until sometime between the late 1880s and early 1900s.

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111 Joseph Badger, ed., *Christian Palladium* 4, no. 11 (October 1, 1835): 174; I would like to thank J. Spencer Fluhman for pointing this source out to me.

112 Harmony Township, where Joseph Smith lived, was changed to Oakland Township in 1853. In that same year, the town of Susquehanna Depot was established across the river, which was changed to Susquehanna in 1869.

113 *Montrose Democrat*, January 31, 1907.

114 "Mormon's Old Home Burns—Prophet Joseph Smith's One Time Residence Destroyed," *Montrose (PA) Independent Republican* 64, no. 27 (July 4, 1919).

115 B. F. Skinner, *Particulars of My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 111.

The account is not included in Emily Blackman's 1873 *History of Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania*, which includes an appendix exclusively devoted to Joseph Smith and the events surrounding his time in Susquehanna County; nor was it included in R. M. Stocker's 1887 *Centennial History*.[116] Since the water-walking legend is the most prominent story about Joseph Smith in Susquehanna today, it seems that it would have at least been mentioned in Blackman's and Stocker's histories if people of the middle to late nineteenth century associated the tale with the Smith homesite in Harmony. Also, as J. Taylor Hollist points out, "Frederick G. Mather interviewed four people in New York and five people in Pennsylvania for his 1880 *Binghamton Republican* article. The interviewees from New York mention the walking-on-water tale, but the Pennsylvanians do not."[117] After the 1880s, the stories became connected with the Joseph Smith homesite in Harmony, Pennsylvania, and eventually with the Aaronic Priesthood Restoration monument, placed there in 1960, which stands near the bank of the Susquehanna River.[118]

The legend continued to be passed on as an oral tale in Susquehanna County. Most match with the usual print story—that it was a series of planks, or platforms, somehow suspended just below the surface and that boys from town removed a plank.[119] Others say

116 Emily C. Blackman, *History of Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania* (Baltimore, MD: Regional Publishing Co., 1970; originally published in Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelinger, 1873); sections dealing with Joseph Smith are found in 102–105, and appendix 1, 577–582; Rhamanthus M. Stocker, *Centennial history of Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia : R. T. Peck & Co., 1887).

117 Hollist, "Walking-on-Water Stories," 38.

118 The foundation of the Smith home can still be seen. It is located on State Highway 171 near the McKune cemetery in Oakland Township. It is marked as a historical site and is accompanied by a bronze monument, placed there by the LDS Church in 1960, commemorating the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood.

119 In some print versions, the individual who removed the planks is named, though usually referred to as mischievous local boys. One odd variation recorded in a 1999 postcard by a missionary who "learned a lot of Mormon History from locals" states, "Joseph Smith tried to walk in the water on the Susqie river, but Mormon tricked him and pulled out the wood and he drowned" (postcard in possession of the author).

it was a rope bridge and a local man floated down from above, using a reed for a snorkel, and cut the ropes as Joseph was crossing (I have talked to several people who claimed the sharp-knifed snorkeler was their great-uncle or great-grandfather). Still others say that it was a ladder that simply broke as he was crossing.[120] Susquehanna resident Eugene Price has heard two versions with unique elements: one is that the river simply washed part of the structure away, and the other is that the water level dropped during the night and exposed the structure, revealing his plot.[121] Another far-fetched version is that there were "two men under the water with breathing tubes holding Joseph up on a board as he walked and the two men were discovered when they came up for air. The board on which Joseph Smith was standing was tipped, causing him to fall into the water."[122] Perhaps the most absurd version is that Smith was walking on chicken wire somehow stretched taut across the river.[123]

Missouri

I have been able to locate only one printed account placing the legend in Missouri. This account, written by L. B. Coggins and printed in 1906 in the *Christian Standard* of Cincinnati, relates the legend as "a little incident which I recently heard from the lips of one who was

120 The plank structure and the rope bridge version I heard from locals. The ladder version was told to me by a Susquehanna resident (who wishes to remain anonymous) whose family has lived in Susquehanna as far back as he can remember. He was told the story by his grandmother, who was born in the 1890s; personal interview, August 4, 2004.

121 Personal interview, August 3, 2004. The latter two versions are interesting variations because neither version mentions any involvement of locals in rigging the structure, and according to the third version Smith never actually got to attempt to walk on the water.

122 This version was obtained by J. Taylor Hollist from a telephone interview conducted on February 6, 2004, with Gary Robinson of Oneonta, New York, who grew up in Susquehanna, Pennsylvania. See Hollist, "Walking-on-Water Stories," 41.

123 This version was told to me by Nancy Mess, who has done extensive genealogical research in the Susquehanna Valley and has heard the story over and over from her relatives living all along the Susquehanna River Valley, from Oneonta, New York, to Oakland, Pennsylvania.

an eye-witness . . . Uncle Billie Jackson, of Higginsville, Mo." In this version, Uncle Billie is coerced by a friend, Tom Parvin, to attend a Mormon gathering at "Smith Creek, about three miles south of Fairwest [sic (Far West)]." Though reluctant, Uncle Billie obliges Parvin by attending the service—persuaded by the sure attendance of a pretty Mormon girl—which was also attended by "great crowds . . . from all over the country." Encouraged by such an audience, Smith attempted to "prove his apostleship by walking to and fro across the surface of the water." After a successful display, he announced a repeat exhibition later that afternoon. As expected, Parvin and Uncle Billie ventured into the water and, after discovering the hidden "slab," "discovered that [they] could perform the same miracle." They proceeded, as usual, to saw partway through the slab, which foiled the next display—performed "in royal robes"—sending Smith swimming and muttering, "The devil did that." The author closes the sketch assuring readers that "this is a true story," which "no doubt many of the readers of the Standard will [re]member."[124]

Illinois

While passing through Illinois in the spring of 1946, Austin and Alta Fife collected an oral variant of the legend placing the event on the Mississippi River in Nauvoo, Illinois, where Smith had lived from 1839 until his murder in 1844.[125] The association of the legend with Nauvoo may have begun with the comedic performances and yarn spinnings of the frontier clown Dan Rice. Eventually known as "the 'Daddy' of all American Clowns,"[126] Rice apparently made his clowning debut either in Davenport, Iowa, or Galena, Illinois, in the fall of 1844.[127] Prior to that time he had worked as a circus apprentice,

124 L. B. Coggins, "The Devil and Mormonism," *Christian Standard* 42, no. 39 (September 29, 1906).

125 The Latter-day Saints established Nauvoo (formerly Commerce), Illinois, in 1839 and dwelt there until 1846. Joseph Smith was killed by a mob in Carthage, Illinois, near Nauvoo, in June 1844.

126 R. E. Sherwood, *Here We Meet Again: Recollections of an Old Circus Clown* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1926), caption of illustration after p. 148.

127 James Ross Moore, "Rice, Dan," in American National Biography (New York:

involved in strongman routines and blackface minstrelsy. Rice worked several additional apprenticeships, particularly in the Iowa–Illinois area during the spring of 1843, when the Latter-day Saints were living in nearby Nauvoo. Naturally, Rice picked up on the local "history" and deftly incorporated Mormonism into his routine, claiming an apprenticeship in "humbugging" with the Mormon prophet "Joe Smith."[128]

To the historian, Rice's life is more legend than fact. Elements of his actual life "peek . . . through his fables like glimpses through a river fog," wrote biographer David Carlyon.[129] Though Carlyon understood Rice's tale about his association with Smith to be a fabrication, some unwitting biographers were apparently duped by his yarn and accepted it as fact.[130] In her preface to *The Life of Dan Rice*, published in 1901, biographer Maria Ward Brown states that Rice worked for some time "disseminating *Mormon doctrine*s, with an especial commission from Joe Smith at $50 per month."[131] The 1935 *Dictionary of American Biography* likewise stated, rather matter-of-factly, that "for a few months [Rice] was an agent for Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet."[132]

Biographer Don Carle Gillette, drawing on the seven previously "attempted" biographies of Rice, accepts and retells the narrative of Rice's apprenticeship to Smith.[133] According to this synthesized

Oxford, 1999), 18:406.

128 David Carlyon, *Dan Rice: The Most Famous Man You've Never Heard of* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), 48–49.

129 Carlyon, *Dan Rice*, 48.

130 Carlyon, *Dan Rice,* 49, points out at that by this time "the water-walk story was [at least] fifteen years old, told on Smith in his Ohio days."

131 Maria Ward Brown, *The Life of Dan Rice* (Long Branch, NJ: Maria Ward Brown, 1901), vi.

132 George Harvey Genzmer, "Rice, Dan," in *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), 8:536. See also John Culhane, *The American Circus: An Illustrated History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1990), 50; Earl Chapin May, *The Circus from Rome to Ringling* (New York: Dover, 1963), 61, refers to Rice's "shady association with Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet."

133 Don Carle Gillette, *He Made Lincoln Laugh: The Story of Dan Rice* (New York: Exposition Press, 1967), 65–73. In a prefaced "Warning Note," Gillette relates an anecdotal 1893 interview in which Rice warned his seventh biographer of

account, Smith attended one of Rice's "super Samson" strongman performances and saw in Rice the "miracle man" he needed.[134] Smith's followers—whom Gillette refers to as "dupes"—were purportedly "grumbling audibly" and "Smith needed some new miracles to restore the faith . . . and reunite his crumbling ranks." Rice, unaware of Smith's designs, struck a deal to perform a strongman routine disguised as a "poor wayfarer," which Smith would stage to his Saints as "'the new miracles which the Spirit has empowered me to bring to you.'" Smith and Rice would split the proceeds from the "required deposit" ("a quarter apiece—a dime for children") that spectators were required to drop in the baptismal font of hewn stone. After being repeatedly swindled by Smith, however, Rice became disillusioned and began planning his escape from the community.[135]

Rice's plan for his departure came to him during a lunch meeting he had in Nauvoo with a Methodist minister, Reverend Peter Cartwright, and "a legal representative," identified as none other than "Abe Lincoln" himself. During the conversation, Cartwright mentioned a rumor that Smith had announced that he would walk on the water "at daybreak tomorrow," to which Lincoln responded—smiling indulgently—"'Walk on water? . . . That is a miracle I would be interested in seeing myself.'" Rice admitted that he knew "something about that stunt," having suggested it to Smith previously, and then was struck with the idea that he could turn it into "the miracle to end all of Joseph Smith's miracles."[136]

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what "a perilous task" it was to try to reconstruct his life, spinning a yarn about all of the fantastic mishaps that had befallen the previous six in their failed attempts. One would think Gillette would have taken the warning himself and been a little more skeptical of the fables Rice had pawned off on journalists and biographers as history.

134 Gillette's account varies somewhat from that of earlier Rice biographer Maria Ward Brown who, rather than posing Smith as the original schemer, gives Rice the credit for seeing in Nauvoo "an abundant field for his labors . . . where his apparent superhuman accomplishments might well make him famous." In Brown's account it was Rice who proposed that "he and Smith would make a pretty strong team professionally." Brown, *Life of Dan Rice*, 81.

135 Gillette, *He Made Lincoln Laugh*, 65–70.

136 Gillette, *He Made Lincoln Laugh*, 71.

Gillette provides a very detailed account of the next morning's events. The town's citizens were summoned by the "clashing of cymbals and blowing of trumpets," and Smith led an elaborate procession from the temple to the "secret spot" on the river. "Arrayed in richly ornamented high-priest vestment," he walked the runway, which was concealed by the "rippling muddy waters of the Mississippi," and, of course, went down on the twenty-ninth step with a "horrendous scream" into the "turbid current." Meanwhile, "sitting peacefully in a skiff almost across the river, watching the fiasco with smiles of satisfaction, was wayfarer Dan Rice," who had of course removed the planks the night before.[137]

Rice's legend eventually made its way to Salt Lake City. Judge C. C. Goodwin, editor of the *Salt Lake Tribune*—the often virulent non-Mormon newspaper of Salt Lake City—recounted the legend in an article published in *Munsey's Magazine* in 1900. In the article, Goodwin recalls a conversation he had "some years ago" with Rice, accepting Rice's claim that he "knew Joe Smith intimately at Nauvoo." According to Goodwin's version, Smith told Rice,

> Dan, the people are growing restless. We must give them a miracle. The river is muddy: you build, on the quiet, a platform, and anchor it about a foot below the surface of the water. I will walk on the water.

Rice "fixed the platform all right," omitting a few planks "about twelve feet out from the shore," and, predictably, Smith "went down and the miracle was smashed to smithereens." Goodwin admits that he "thought Rice was romancing" but states that he believes his story as much as he does those of the Mormon leaders, by which of course he means—not at all.[138]

Mormon Responses

Though I have found no clear statement by Joseph Smith regarding the water-walking legend, several early Latter-day Saints refuted

137 Gillette, *He Made Lincoln Laugh*, 71–73.

138 C. C. Goodwin, "The Truth About the Mormons," *Munsey's Magazine* 23 (June 1900): 312.

the story. In 1834, Oliver Cowdery, the editor of the *Evening and Morning Star* reproached the *Messenger* and the *Courier* for printing an article—which was probably the first printed account of the legend—that was "not only foolish, but was false."[139] In the Nauvoo periodical *Times and Seasons*, an 1844 editorial announcing the candidacy of Joseph Smith for president refers to the "old fabrication of 'walk on the water'" as a "story [that] has been put into requisition to blast our fame."[140] And *History of the Church* refers to a series of anti-Mormon pamphlets as "forged letters, apostate lies, and 'walk on the water' stories."[141] Lumping the water-walking stories together with forged letters and apostate lies strongly implies that early Latter-day Saints regarded the legend as untrue.

In 1832, Ira Ames, then a recent convert to Mormonism, recalls being ridiculed by his grandfather's neighbors with "tales about 'Jo Smith' walking on the water, gold hunting &c &c."[142] Likewise, Warren Foote, a New York resident who was baptized into the LDS Church in 1834, recalls a version of the tale that he heard a Methodist minister relate "and chuckle over it, as though it was a splendid joke on 'Joe Smith,'" stating "that [the] story was sufficient to burst up 'Mormonism.'" Foote called the story a "foolish lie," which of course did not break up Mormonism.[143]

In 1844, Mormon apostle Parley P. Pratt published a somewhat satirical sketch entitled "A Dialogue between Joseph Smith and the Devil," in which the character representing Joseph Smith denies the water-walking stories, "which have had an extensive circulation by

139 *Evening and Morning Star* 2, no. 19 (April, 1834): 151.

140 "Who Shall Be Our Next President?" *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 4 (February 15, 1844): 441.

141 Joseph Smith, *History of The Church*, 3:21; the pamphlets were those of Richard Livesey, discussed earlier.

142 Ira Ames, 1804–1869, Autobiography 1858, MS 6055, s.v. August 6, 1832, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah. Ames reports that he was quite shaken up by the incident, but was reassured of the truth of Mormonism after being visited three times by a "personage" in a dream that night.

143 Warren Foote, Autobiography of Warren Foote, Vol. 1 (1817–1846), [typescript], 3–4 [ms. pp. 5–6], L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

means of your [the devil's] editors and priests." He further denies "the principle of man's working miracles, either real or pretended as a proof of his mission."[144] Speaking in the Salt Lake Tabernacle in 1858, Apostle George A. Smith commented on persecutions Joseph Smith had received and stated, "Editors published their false statements, one of which, no doubt, will be remembered—a pretended miracle of walking on the water."[145]

J. W. Peterson, a member of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS; now Community of Christ), published a pamphlet in 1897 in which he relates a version of the legend told to him by a purported eyewitness, who claimed that "her two brothers were among the rest that removed one of the planks." Having heard "that old fib" before, and suspecting false testimony, Peterson cross-examined the woman:

> I asked her if her brothers were younger or older than she and she said, 'they were both younger.' I then asked her how old she was and she said she was born in 1843. I informed her that Joseph Smith was killed in 1844, and suggested that her memory was excellent to remember things so young, and that her brothers, both younger, must have been young acrobats indeed.

Peterson went on to explain the implausibility of building a structure in the Mississippi and lamented that he continued to hear the legend repeated "in almost every neighborhood and upon no better authority." Defending his prophet's status, he concluded that "those who circulate such stories exhibit their ignorance of the teaching of Joseph Smith, for he taught that miracles were not to make believers. He could have had no object in view in attempting such a thing, nor did he either."[146]

Similarly, some defenders would try to refute the allegations by

144 Pratt's "Dialogue" is found in Richard H. Cracroft and Neal E. Lambert, *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 263.

145 George A. Smith, Salt Lake Tabernacle, January 10, 1858, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–1886), 7:112.

146 J. W. Peterson, *Who was Joseph Smith?: Was he a false prophet?* (Independence, MO: *Ensign* Publishing House, 1897), 9–10.

citing implausibilities in the tales. Albert E. Stone, an RLDS caretaker and guide in the Kirtland Temple in 1905, recalled: "I was here in the House of the Lord when one Mrs. White[,] if my memory serves me, asked me if I had ever heard that Joe Smith tried to walk the water on the north side of the bridge which spans the East Branch of the sygrin [Chagrin] River in Kirtland." After she related the usual account to him, which involved driving in "ace stakes," claiming that her brother was involved in rigging the structure, Stone recorded his rebuttal in his journal:

> It must first be remembered that the bed of the river on the north side of the Bridge is one solid ledge of rock, which would prevent any man from driving stakes, second that during ordinary seasons the water is not deep enough there to admit of two inch Plank being placed three inches below the surface. the third and rediculas [sic] part of the old Fable is that the year 1906 when the story was told the Lady? was 60 years old, her Brother who took such an active part in the Drama, was two years her Junior making him 58 years old in 1906. he having been born in the year 1848 or four years after Joseph Smith was killed. quite a smart boy to be able to perform such a Miracle as that[.] why he had done greater things that they were laying at the foot of the Prophet.

Feeling he had outwitted Mrs. White's slander, Stone recorded, "such things went to strengthen the Faith of the writer."[147]

Though nineteenth-century Mormons resented the tales told about their prophet, they were not free from such exposés themselves. Folklorist Barre Toelken points out that the same legend told about Joseph Smith shows up in early missionary journals, associating the

147 Autobiography of Elder Albert E. Stone, a manuscript in the Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri, undated accession material 3691–3694. Mark Staker has pointed out that "although the water was too shallow to fit such an experience in 1906, in 1831 the mill dams raised the water level to seven feet and Hansen's pond was deep enough to hide planks. It was also wide enough that someone could walk out in the middle and still be a distance from those watching. However, the details about the rocky river base are correct and it is unlikely anyone could drive stakes into the base of the river" (Mark L. Staker to Stanley Thayne, November 6, 2006; in author's possession).

legend with a "Protestant revivalist charlatan in Virginia."[148] One such account is found in the journal of Robert Harris Fife, who served as a missionary in Virginia from 1894 to 1896. Fife derisively refers to "Salvationists or Sanctified people as they call themselves" who were making frequent tours of the area, impressing the people with miracles that were, "of course," deception. Ironically, this account, located in a bay on the eastern shore of Virginia, is strikingly similar to several Joseph Smith variants, with a previously constructed platform, a successful first attempt, the discovery and sabotage of the structure, and a failed second attempt—"a plunge, a douce"—followed by a near drowning. After mockingly comparing and contrasting the "old fellow" with Peter—"but lo," in this attempt, "no Christ was there to give him aid"—Fife laments, "'O ye of little faith . . .' Why did ye go beyond your walk-way which you had prepared to deceive the people."[149] Thus some Mormon missionaries exhibited the same propensity for legend telling, ironically—and probably unwittingly[150]—flinging the imposture stories told about their prophet back onto Protestant ministers.

Conclusion: Legend as Truth and as Symbol

So what is the truth? What really did or did not happen? It is impossible to know for sure, but there are several possibilities. Perhaps there is some grain of truth to the legend. Perhaps some religious figure at one time, or multiple times, really did attempt such a performance and was foiled. Perhaps then the story was subsequently attached to other religious leaders. Or perhaps it was a natural tendency of many during the time, and at other times, to attempt such a feat (or imposition). Perhaps some other zealous proselyte—such as the accused Mormon preacher—attempted to perform such a miracle during a time of particular religious excitement, and it later became associated with the leader of the movement. Or maybe the legend morphed into

148 Toelken, "Water Narratives," 198.

149 Austin E. Fife, "Virginia Folkways from a Mormon Journal," *Western Folklore* 9, no. 4 (October 1950): 356.

150 There is no evidence to suggest these missionaries were aware of the water-walking stories associated with Joseph Smith.

being out of some other event, such as a baptism, a speech, or some display of religious enthusiasm. Or perhaps it was simply the creation of sensational journalism, comedy routines, and clever storytellers. It is simply impossible to tell.

Truth, then, is a sticky issue in legend. Legend is fraught with ambiguity. As one folklorist put it, a legend "is believed to be true by some, false by others, or both or neither by most."[151] The "truth" or "falsity" of a legend, then, is primarily relative to who is telling the story and what they want to believe about it. It is that ambiguity—the possibility of truth, the plausibility of some grain of truth, and the probability of falsehood—that distinguishes a legend from both historical fact and fairytale and that makes its analysis so debatable and often baffling. But, despite such ambiguity, truth is an important factor in legend telling. Elliot Oring argues that "the narration of a legend is, in a sense, the negotiation of the truth of these episodes . . . At the core of the legend is an evaluation of its truth status. It might be that a particular narrative is regarded as false, or true, or false by some and true by others . . . Whatever the opinion . . . in a legend, the question of truth must be *entertained* even if that truth is ultimately rejected." [152]

Biographer Fawn M. Brodie referred to the walking-on-water legends of Joseph Smith and Jemima Wilkinson as "equally apocryphal stor[ies]," but she suggests that they are "none the less symbolic."[153] Mormon apologist Hugh Nibley criticized Brodie for citing "a tale that is *known to be false* simply because it symbolizes her idea of Joseph Smith," yet, in his criticism, Nibley agrees that the legend is a symbol.[154] The walking-on-water legend symbolizes perception.

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151 Robert Georges, as quoted in Linda Dégh, *Legend and Belief: Dialectics of a Folklore Genre* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 43.

152 Elliot Oring, "Folk Narratives," in *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction*, ed. Elliot Oring (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1986), 125.

153 Brodie, Life of Joseph Smith, 83–84.

154 Hugh Nibley, *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass: The Art of Telling Tales About Joseph Smith and Brigham Young*, ed. David Whittaker (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1991), 32; emphasis in original.

Though in reality a purported incident either happened or it did not, since it is impossible to ultimately know and thus prove or disprove past events of legendary nature (such as the water-walking legends), a study of legend is more useful for understanding the teller and the teller's society than for determining the reality or falsity of an actual historical incident. Thus, legend serves, psychologically, as a "symbolic representation of folk belief."[155]

Folklorist Lutz Röhrich referred to legend as a "cultural language of fear." "People . . . tell legends in order to 'verbalize anxieties and fears and, by explaining these away, to free themselves from the oppressive power of their fears.'"[156] The water-walking legend reveals nineteenth-century fears and anxieties about religious change and distrust of religious innovators—an innate (or possibly inherited) desire to disqualify prophet-figures and thereby brush them off as frauds. Thus, legend telling has been a sort of "self therapy" for those who have been confronted with the type of ambiguity modern prophets represent. [157]

The water-walking legend is just one example of a body of legends that expose prophet-figures as impostors through pretended "miracles" gone awry. Another legend, with a form similar to the water-walking legend, asserts that Joseph Smith had trained a dove to fly to his shoulder by putting birdseed in his ear and that he planned to mimic the New Testament sign of the Holy Ghost by having the dove descend upon him during worship services. But alas, after repeatedly calling for the sign during worship services, the voice of his plotting assistant, who had been stationed in the rafters to release the bird, called down that a cat had gone and eaten the "Holy Ghost."[158] In a similar tale told on the other side of the Atlantic, prophet John Wroe, who was

155 Tangherlini, "Legend," 437, 439.

156 Lutz Röhrich, as quoted and summarized in Dégh, *Legend and Belief*, 37; see also Lutz Röhrich, "The Quest for Meaning in Folk Narrative Research," in *The Brothers Grimm and Folktale,* ed. James M. McGlathery (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 8.

157 Röhrich, quoted in Dégh, *Legend and Belief*, 37.

158 See "A Mormon Miracle Knocked in the Head," *Norwalk (OH) Huron Reflector* 14, no. 4 (February 14, 1843); "Stephen H. Hart's Statement," and "Mrs. J. D. Barber's Statement," in Deming, *Naked Truths*, 3–4.

supposed to be in the midst of a ten- to twelve-day visionary trance, was seen by a neighbor who peeked through a window to be "sitting up eating beefsteak, pickled cabbage and oatcake."[159] Other legends depict ministering angels being exposed as men in sheets,[160] bogus healings or exorcisms, swindlings, or other staged and foiled displays of divine power. Such legends were a natural folk reaction to modern prophets—a method of refutation that served as a reassurance for those who chose to disbelieve in a certain prophet or leader or in supernatural events altogether.

Ultimately, the walking-on-water legend stands as a symbol of belief and skepticism—representing, to believers, persecution of the truth and, to skeptics, exposure of fraud. Brodie and others regard it as a symbol that accurately represents a self-proclaimed prophet's character, but to many Latter-day Saints, Christian Israelites, Fisherites, and followers of the Publick Universal Friend—or any other religious group whose leader is thus portrayed—such tales are a symbol of the types of falsehood and slander that have been created to discredit their prophet by making him or her look like a fraud; as one early Mormon editor put it, "the old fabrication of 'walk on the water,'. . . put into requisition to blast our fame."[161] However one interprets the legend, it is a lingering echo of the hubbub that arose in response to the rise of prophets in the modern world.

159 Green, *Prophet John Wroe*, 10.

160 "Capture of a Mormon Angel," *Rockville (IN) Intelligencer* 1, no. 2 (July 18, 1835).

161 *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 4 (February 15, 1844), 441. Also in Smith, *History of The Church*, 6:217.

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